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USA TODAY

THE NATION'S NEWS | \$3 | MONDAY, JANUARY 6, 2025

CYNTHIA ERIVO AND ARIANA GRANDE BY KEVIN WINTER/GETTY IMAGES

Carter's spirit extends far, wide

Ga. procession makes stops in rural areas

Sarah Clifton and Evan Lasseter
USA TODAY NETWORK

Jimmy Carter, the first U.S. president to be born in a hospital and the first to live to be 100 years old, was remembered at services in Georgia this weekend for his improbable journey from a rural upbringing to world leader.

The nation's 39th president, who died Dec. 29, was honored Saturday with events that mirrored his march through Georgia politics, ending with his arrival in Atlanta, where he was scheduled lie in repose for two days. Carter will be honored with a state funeral in Washington, D.C., later this week.

Carter's term as president is often associated with malaise, as the country dealt with high inflation and international crises in the aftermath of the Watergate scandal and Vietnam War, but his career as a statesman and humanitarian for more than 40 years

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Speaker Mike Johnson receives the gavel from Rep. Hakeem Jeffries during the 119th Congress' first session Friday. JACK GRUBER/USA TODAY

Johnson granted the speakership, but House GOP still has issues

Riley Beggin
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON — House Republicans gave Mike Johnson the speaker's gavel on Friday — along with a warning.

Nine GOP lawmakers at first either abstained from voting for Johnson or voted for a different person for speaker. All but one, Rep. Thomas Massie of Kentucky, changed their vote to Johnson before it was gavelled in, granting him the speakership on the first ballot.

But that number is significant: Under new House rules approved Friday evening, nine House Republicans will be needed to call a vote to oust Johnson from his role, a process known as a "motion to vacate." And unless Democrats would be willing to save him in a closely divided House, nine members would be plenty to kick him out of the

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Temporary fencing has been erected around the perimeter of the U.S. Capitol ahead of Monday's certification of the election and Jan. 20 inauguration. JOSH MORGAN/USA TODAY

This time, certification of election less messy

4 years after Trump supporters rioted at Capitol, lawmakers expect calm

Riley Beggin and Sudiksha Kochi
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON — For the last four years, there's been a baseball bat propped up in a corner of Elissa Slotkin's office.

The Democrat from Michigan bought it after Jan. 6, 2021, when she found herself barricaded inside that office as a mob of Donald Trump's supporters roamed the U.S. Capitol, climbing in through smashed windows and doors, facing off with Capitol police officers and breaking into the abandoned House and Senate chambers, where lawmakers had been meeting to formalize the results of the 2020 presidential election.

Slotkin, a former House member who began her first term as a U.S. senator on Friday, recalled rushing into her office and frantically looking around for a weapon to defend herself and others, should the mob reach them, finding none.

"It's a day that is seared on my memory," she told USA TODAY. "It was an extremely dark stain on our country's history."

Congress worked until the early hours of the morning on Jan. 7 to certify Joe Biden's win in the 2020 election. When they returned to session after the riot, some Republican lawmakers moved to overturn the election results

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Four years ago, Trump supporters breached security and entered the Capitol as Congress debated the 2020 presidential election certification.

ROBERTO SCHMIDT/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

"It's a day that is seared on my memory. It was an extremely dark stain on our country's history."

Sen. Elissa Slotkin
Former Democratic House member from Michigan

Memories of 2020 weigh on some at the dawning of next Trump era

Michael Collins, Bart Jansen and Sudiksha Kochi
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON — No one expects an angry mob to show up this time.

Four years to the day that supporters of Donald Trump attacked the U.S. Capitol and tried to halt the certification of the 2020 election, Congress will usher in a new Trump era on Monday when it gathers to count each state's electoral votes and officially declare him the winner of last year's presidential contest.

This time, the proceeding is expected to go off smoothly. No rioters storming the Capitol. No one pushing past police barricades and beating officers with makeshift weapons. No lawmakers running through the Capitol's corridors in fear of their lives. No sitting president pressuring a vice president to thwart the process.

"I think it will almost be a non-event," predicted Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn.

The difference between then and now is Trump.

Four years ago, the Republican refused to acknowledge he lost to Democrat Joe Biden, claiming the

See MEMORIES, Page 6A

Cancer warnings on alcohol? Not so fast



Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy wants warning labels acknowledging a link between alcohol consumption and increased risk for cancer.

KEVIN NERI/USA TODAY NETWORK

Even advocacy groups acknowledge big hurdles

Jeanine Santucci and Adrianna Rodriguez
USA TODAY

The country's top doctor wants a new warning added to alcohol that would alert drinkers about links to cancer, but don't expect cigarette-style warning labels any time soon.

U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy said Friday that there is a direct link between alcohol consumption and increased risk for cancer, including

cancers of the breast, esophagus, liver and several others. For some cancers, that risk starts at just one drink a day or even fewer, he said.

He wants new warning labels that acknowledge the link — and for new assessments of alcohol consumption guidelines to factor in cancer risk too.

But even advocacy groups supportive of the move acknowledged Friday that it would face serious hurdles before ever making it to store shelves, the Hackensack Meridian Health John Theurer Cancer Center said in a statement. The decision to update the label

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Does alcohol increase the risk of cancer?

Mixed messages persist as research is growing

Eduardo Cuevas

USA TODAY

A growing body of evidence has shown links between cancer and drinking alcohol.

In a warning Friday, U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy said cancer risk increases with the number of drinks, but even one drink a day can be dangerous.

Current federal guidelines recommend that if people want to drink alcohol, women should drink no more than one drink per day and men no more than two.

“Alcohol is a well-established, preventable cause of cancer responsible for about 100,000 cases of cancer and 20,000 cancer deaths annually in the United States,” Murthy said in a statement announcing his advisory.

He added the death toll of alcohol-related cancer deaths was higher than the 13,500 deaths from drunken driving crashes annually in the U.S. But, he said, “the majority of Americans are unaware of this risk.”

The science related to drinking has changed in recent years, leading to some confusion among consumers. At one point, moderate drinking was thought to be healthier than not drinking at all, because of possible benefits to the heart and bloodstream.

A recent federal report supported that hypothesis, though the finding has been widely criticized. Other data finds that even moderate drinking, as Murthy said, can lead to health problems including cancer.

Numerous studies have linked alcohol consumption with cancers, including those of the mouth, esophagus, breast, liver and colon, said Timothy Rebbeck, professor of cancer prevention at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston.

“More recent data have confirmed that even occasional alcohol consumption is associated with the risk of some cancers,” he said in a statement.

Murthy’s warning appropriately emphasized the importance of limiting



“Alcohol is a well-established, preventable cause of cancer responsible for about 100,000 cases of cancer,” Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy said. GETTY IMAGES

alcohol to reduce cancer risk, Rebbeck said.

The idea of a warning label was met with skepticism from trade groups representing alcoholic beverage manufacturers. The federal government should consider the entire body of scientific research – all harms and potential benefits – regarding alcohol before changing an existing warning label that does not mention cancer risks, Dr. Amanda Berger, senior vice president of science and research of the Distilled Spirits Council, said in a statement sent to USA TODAY.

While many lifestyle choices carry potential risks, she said the council doesn’t recommend anyone drink alcohol to gain any health benefits and urges adults who choose to drink alcohol to consult their doctor.

How does alcohol cause cancer?

The human body breaks alcohol down into chemicals that can damage DNA, causing cells to grow out of control and become cancerous, according to the

National Cancer Institute.

Additionally, alcohol can block the body from breaking down certain nutrients that can increase cancer risk. Alcohol can also increase blood levels of the sex hormone estrogen, which has been linked to higher risk of breast cancer.

The combination of smoking and drinking is “multiplicative” – even more harmful than adding the potential damage of either one alone, according to the cancer institute.

The extent to which drinking alcohol may lower cancer risk of some cancers isn’t fully understood and may be indirect, the institute said.

What does research say?

A recent review of alcohol and cancer research by a National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine committee published in December is meant to shape U.S. Dietary Guidelines.

The review found people who drank moderately were less likely to die prematurely from any cause than those who never drank alcohol.

Moderate alcohol drinking was associated with higher risk of breast cancer, but the review couldn’t draw a conclusion on the association between moderate alcohol consumption and cancers of the mouth, throat, larynx and esophagus.

Others have disagreed with this assessment, including the National Cancer Institute, which warns that even those who drink no more than one drink per day and those who binge drink have “modestly increased risk” for some cancers.

The American Association of Cancer Research’s latest Cancer Progress Report highlighted the role alcohol has in causing cancer. Excessive levels of alcohol consumption increase risk for six cancers, from head and neck, to stomach cancers, the report said.

In the U.S., more than 5% of cancers were linked to alcohol consumption in 2019. Reducing consumption or stopping drinking altogether can decrease the risk of developing alcohol-related cancers by 8%, and for any cancer by 4%, the report said.

Drinks have varying levels of alcoholic content, noted Jiyoung Ahn, a cancer molecular epidemiologist at New York University Langone Health. A Scotch neat has an alcohol by volume (ABV) level upwards of 40%, while a Modelo, America’s most popular beer has 4.4% ABV, and a White Claw hard seltzer, 5%.

It’s important to remember that any amount of alcohol in the body will break down into chemicals, such as acetaldehyde, that can cause cancer.

“If you drink more, it’s really clearly increasing your risk, so moderating and less drinking is better,” Ahn said.

Dr. Bruce Scott, president of the American Medical Association, a professional association of physicians, said Murthy’s advisory will “make completely clear” the link between cancer risk and any alcohol consumption.

“(It) will bolster awareness, improve health, and save lives,” Scott said in a statement. “Despite decades of compelling evidence of this connection, too many in the public remain unaware of alcohol’s risk.”

Contributed: Adrianna Rodriguez and Claire Thornton

Alcohol

Continued from Page 1A

will ultimately be made by Congress, Reuters reports.

A warning label for cancer won’t be coming tomorrow, but the surgeon general’s move could add momentum to what advocates in a 2020 petition to the government said would “have the potential to save lives by ensuring that consumers have a more accurate understanding of the link between alcohol and cancer, which will empower them to better protect their health.”

The idea of a warning label was met with skepticism from trade groups representing alcoholic beverage manufacturers. The federal government should consider the entire body of scientific research – all harms and potential benefits – regarding alcohol before changing an existing warning label that does not mention cancer risks, Dr. Amanda Berger, senior vice president of science and research of the Distilled Spirits Council, said in a statement sent to USA TODAY.

While many lifestyle choices carry potential risks, she said the council doesn’t recommend anyone drink alcohol to gain any health benefits and urges adults who choose to drink alcohol to consult their doctor.

What do warning labels do?

Murthy said adding a warning about cancer will help close a huge gap in public awareness about the risks, which his advisory says has not improved in recent decades despite new research. In a 2019 survey cited in the advisory, just 45% of Americans said they were aware alcohol was a risk factor for cancer, compared to 91% for radiation exposure, 89% for tobacco use, 81% for asbestos exposure and 53% for obesity.

“While scientific evidence for this connection has been growing over the past four decades, less than half of Americans recognize it as a risk factor for cancer,” his office said.

The public has for years been getting mixed messages about the pros and cons of drinking alcohol, and warning labels would remind people of the strong scientific evidence connecting increased alcohol intake with elevated risk of some cancers, said Jiyoung Ahn, a cancer molecular epidemiologist at NYU Langone Health in Manhattan.

“There’s plenty of evidence of alcohol as a potential cancer risk, but the public has not been fully aware,” Ahn told USA TODAY. “So I think it’s the right decision to announce this.”

Murthy says in the advisory that warning labels that display imagery rather than just plain text, in addition to rotating messages, are more effective at influencing people’s awareness and behavior.

Current required warning labels on alcohol sold in the U.S. say: “GOVERNMENT WARNING: (1) According to the Surgeon General, women should not drink alcoholic beverages during pregnancy because of the risk of birth defects. (2) Consumption of alcoholic beverages impairs your ability to drive a car or operate machinery, and may cause health problems.”

The label hasn’t been updated since 1988 when it was introduced.

Dr. Laura Catena, a winemaker and doctor based in San Francisco, said in a written statement she welcomes any kind of alert or communication from the surgeon general about the dangers of heavy alcohol drinking and cancer risks.

However, she says more research is needed to assess the overall health outcomes of moderate drinking before creating a warning label.

Other scientists say the data is clear. Any amount of alcohol is associated

with an increased risk of certain cancers and Americans should be making informed decisions about consumption, said Jennifer Hay, behavioral scientist at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York City.

“It’s not prohibition or making alcohol illegal,” she said. “It’s all about making sure that people are aware around the actual data of alcohol and cancer.”

How likely are new warning labels?

Existing health labels, which appear in small print on alcohol containers, were made mandatory by the Alcoholic Beverage Labeling Act of 1988. Any change or addition to the labels would also have to go through Congress, said Timothy Rebbeck, professor of cancer prevention at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health.

“There’s plenty of evidence of alcohol as a potential cancer risk, but the public has not been fully aware. So I think it’s the right decision to announce this.”

Jiyoung Ahn
NYU Langone Health
cancer molecular epidemiologist

And such a change is likely to face opposition from the alcohol manufacturing industry; some companies’ shares tumbled by as much as 3% after Murthy’s announcement Friday, according to Reuters.

The surgeon general can also make a recommendation for companies to voluntarily label their products.

With the Biden administration on its

way out of office and a Republican-controlled Congress on the horizon, it’s also unclear how the new administration will act on the surgeon general’s call to require labels.

Whether labels are in alcohol’s future or not, Rebbeck said it’s only the beginning. When the first surgeon general’s report on smoking came out in 1964, he said it took decades for public health officials to come up with a plan to end smoking that included strategies such as limiting advertisements, banning cigarettes in public places, taxation and economic incentives.

“It took time for people’s mindset to change and it’s going to be the same for alcohol,” he said.

Do other countries have warnings on alcohol?

According to the surgeon general’s advisory, 47 countries require warnings on alcohol about health risks, including the U.S.

In South Korea, alcohol manufacturers are required to choose one of three messages to include on a warning label, two of which mention cancer.

Ireland became the first country in the European Union to include such a warning, which goes into effect for all alcohol beginning in 2026. Labels there will read: “There is a direct link between alcohol and fatal cancers.” It will also include a warning about liver disease and drinking while pregnant.

Alcohol and cancer risk is an issue that’s been developing “for a long time” in other countries, said Hay.

“This is a really important and positive movement for the U.S. to acknowledge,” she said. “The scientific literature is solid and we should address the barriers to get cancer warnings on labels on alcohol.”

Contributing: Claire Thornton, USA TODAY; Reuters

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President Joe Biden presents the Presidential Medal of Freedom to (clockwise from top left) Michael J. Fox, Bill Nye, Bono, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and Denzel Washington during a ceremony in the East Room of the White House on Saturday. PHOTOS BY KEN CEDENO/REUTERS

Clinton, Soros among 19 given Medal of Freedom

Joey Garrison
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden on Saturday named former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and billionaire political activist and philanthropist George Soros recipients of the Presidential Medal of Freedom, part of a group of 19 people selected for the nation's highest civilian honor.

Others presented the medal by the outgoing president at a White House ceremony included U2 frontman Bono, actor Michael J. Fox, actor Denzel Washington, chef José Andrés and William Sanford Nye, better known as television's "Bill Nye the Science Guy."

From the sports world, decorated professional soccer player Lionel Messi of Argentina and retired NBA legend Earvin "Magic" Johnson also received the medal. Messi did not attend the ceremony because of a scheduling issue.

"You all you all literally embody the nation's creed, *e pluribus unum* — out of many, one," Biden told the recipients during the ceremony in the White House East Room. "You feed the hungry. You give hope to those who are hurting, and you craft the signs and sounds our movements and our memories."

Four recipients were recognized posthumously: former Defense Secretary Ash Carter; civil rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer; Robert F. Kennedy, the former U.S. attorney general and U.S. senator from New York, who was assassinated while running for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1968; and George Romney, a former Republican Michigan governor and chairman of American Motors Corp.

Kennedy, one of Biden's heroes and brother of the late President John F. Kennedy, is the father of Robert F. Kennedy Jr., President-elect Donald Trump's nominee for secretary of the Health and Human Services department. Romney is the father of outgoing U.S. Sen. Mitt Romney, R-Utah.

In choosing the 94-year-old Soros for the Presidential Medal of Freedom, Biden honored a major contributor to liberal and Democratic causes as well as Biden's past presidential campaigns. Soros, a Hungarian-American of Jewish descent who made billions as a hedge fund manager, is a frequent target of criticism and conspiracy theories from the political right.

Clinton, the former first lady fiercely opposed by Republicans, received a standing ovation as she was introduced to the crowd during the ceremony. Clinton served as a U.S. senator from New York in addition to leading the State Department during the Obama administration. She ran unsuccessfully for president against Trump in 2016.

The full list of Biden's latest Presidential Medal of Freedom recipients

José Andrés: Renowned chef and founder of the nonprofit World Central Kitchen

Bono: Frontman of the rock band U2 and activist against AIDS and poverty

Ashton Baldwin Carter (posthumous): Defense secretary under President Barack Obama

Hillary Rodham Clinton: Former first lady, U.S. senator of New York, secretary of state and 2016 Democratic presidential nominee

Michael J. Fox: Actor who has won five Emmy Awards, four Golden Globe Awards, two Screen Actors Guild Awards, and a Grammy Award, and an advocate for Parkinson's disease research and development

Tim Gill: Entrepreneur and advocate for LGBTQI rights and equality

Jane Goodall: Conservationist known for work studying primates and human evolution

Fannie Lou Hamer (posthumous): Founder of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and civil rights activist

Earvin "Magic" Johnson: Retired basketball player who led the Los Angeles Lakers to five championships, entrepreneur and philanthropist working with underserved communities through his Magic Johnson Foundation

Robert Francis Kennedy (posthumous): Former U.S. attorney general, U.S. senator who was assassinated while running for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1968

Ralph Lauren: Fashion designer, known for starting the clothing company Ralph Lauren, and philanthropist most notably in the fight against cancer and the preservation of the Star-Spangled Banner

Lionel Messi: Decorated professional soccer player who supports healthcare and education programs for children through the Leo Messi Foundation and serves as a UNICEF goodwill ambassador

William Sanford Nye: Known as "Bill Nye the Science Guy" on television educating children about science, works as CEO of the Planetary Society and as a vocal advocate for space exploration and environmental stewardship

George W. Romney (posthumous): Chairman and president of American Motors Corporation, the 43rd Governor of Michigan and the 3rd Secretary of Housing and Urban Development

David M. Rubenstein: Co-founder and co-chairman of The Carlyle Group, renowned for his philanthropy and generous support for the restoration of historic landmarks and the country's cultural institutions

George Soros: Billionaire hedge fund manager, known for philanthropic work and supporting progressive and Democratic causes

George Stevens Jr.: Film producer, director and playwright

Denzel Washington: Actor, director and producer who has won two Academy Awards, a Tony Award, two Golden Globes, and the 2016 Cecil B. DeMille Lifetime Achievement Award

Anna Wintour: Fashion icon who has led Vogue as editor-in-chief since 1988

"All her career has been dedicated to an eternal truth: America's ideals are sacred, and we must always defend and live by them," said the citation read by a military aide before Biden draped medal around her neck.

Last week, Biden awarded the Presidential Citizens Medal — the country's second highest civilian award — to former Rep. Liz Cheney, R-Wyo., and Rep. Bennie Thompson, D-Miss., for their role leading the House committee that

investigated the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol. They were among 20 to receive the award.

Saturday's recipients are the second group of Presidential Medal of Freedom honorees Biden has announced this year after awarding 19 others in May including former Vice President Al Gore, former New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg and former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

Contributing: Michael Collins

Storm brings snow, ice, cold across the nation

More than 60 million people under advisories

John Bacon
USA TODAY

ARLINGTON, Va. — More than 60 million Americans were under winter weather and storm advisories Sunday as a swath of the Midwest and East, already gripped by bitter cold temperatures, braced for a historic storm after more than 2 feet of snow already fell in some areas since Friday.

Many school systems that were planning to reopen Monday after a two-week winter holiday break were faced with delaying restarts for a day or more.

"The storm is still taking shape," said meteorologist Rich Bann of the National Weather Service's Weather Prediction Center. "But this thing has multiple hazards from heavy snows in the Plains to significant icing covering roads farther south."

The weather service warned that some areas could see their biggest storm in more than a decade. A wide area of the nation from Nebraska and Kansas through Ohio, Indiana, southwestern Pennsylvania and northwest Virginia could see from 1 inch to a foot of snow, the weather service said.

"It'll be nearly impossible to drive in some areas," he said.

Governors in Kentucky and Virginia declared states of emergency ahead of the weather system. Freezing rain and ice in southern Missouri, Kentucky and Tennessee on Sunday was expected to increase the risks of road hazards and downed power lines.

Authorities warned that downed lines could cause widespread power outages.

"The storm is still taking shape. But this thing has multiple hazards from heavy snows in the Plains to significant icing covering roads farther south."

Rich Bann
Meteorologist at the National Weather Service's Weather Prediction Center

In Arlington and the Washington, D.C., region, where some winters come and go with barely a hint of snow, the storm was forecast to hit Sunday night. The Weather Service warned of total snow and sleet accumulations from 5 to 9 inches. Amounts of 10 to 12 inches were possible in isolated spots if heavy banding sets up in this area, forecasters said, noting a second round of heavy snow was possible late Monday.

Emily Roszkowski, who has taught in Arlington schools for 11 years, said she and her family were looking forward to sledding on a nearby hill.

"I'm excited for the snow, especially for the kids," Roszkowski said. "But I'm also ready to get back to school and into a routine."

Nicole McCullough, a school counselor for the same district, said she also was hoping for the snow.

"One thing I love about living in the D.C. area is experiencing all four seasons," McCullough said. "Bring on the snow!"

As of Sunday morning, more than 17 inches of snow had slammed Erie, Pennsylvania; and Rome, New York, was blasted by almost 2 feet of snow, AccuWeather reported.

And some parts of upstate New York have checked in with more than 30 inches of snow over the last few days.

Temperatures 12-25 degrees below normal for early January are projected across much of the central and eastern U.S. for the next week, AccuWeather warned.

Also, wind gusts Monday were expected in the range of 20-35 mph from the Central states into parts of the Tennessee Valley.

"Should the cold wave evolve to its full potential, maximum temperature departures could plunge 30-40 degrees Fahrenheit below the historical average from the northern Plains and Midwest to the interior Southeast," said Alex Duffus, a meteorologist with AccuWeather.

Contributing: Reuters

Officials probe New Orleans killer's travel

Video shows bombs were placed, did not detonate

John Bacon
USA TODAY

The man accused of killing 14 people in a New Orleans terror attack on New Year's Day was wearing "smart" glasses that would have allowed him to live-stream the rampage had he turned them on, authorities said Sunday.

Shamsud-Din Jabbar also wore the glasses to record his bicycle tour of the French Quarter during a visit to New Orleans in October when he may have been planning his attack, Lionel Myrthil, special agent in charge of the FBI office in New Orleans, said at a briefing.

Jabbar slammed his truck into crowds of revelers shortly after 3 a.m. on New Year's Day. In addition to the deaths, more than 30 people were wounded, some critically. Authorities say the toll could have been worse — newly revealed security video shows Jabbar placing homemade bombs hidden in coolers at two sites on Bourbon Street hours before the attack, authorities said. The bombs did not detonate.

FBI officials said Sunday that they are



Artist Roberto Marquez comforts a woman at a memorial he built to honor the victims of a Jan. 1 attack on Bourbon Street in New Orleans that killed 14 people. TREVOR HUGHES/USA TODAY

also delving into Jabbar's trips from last year.

"We have also tracked that Jabbar traveled to Cairo, Egypt, from June 22 until July 3 of 2023. A few days later he flew to Ontario, Canada, on July 10 and returned to the U.S. on July 13 of 2023," Myrthil said.

"Our agents are getting answers as to where he went, who he met with and how those trips may or may not tie into his actions in our city in New Orleans," he said.

Mayor LaToya Cantrell said the

Greater New Orleans Foundation has set up a fund at gnof.org for donations. She said she will welcome President Joe Biden to the city Monday and will ask that a tactical expert be sent to New Orleans to recommend "target hardening measures" to ensure safety during upcoming national events such as the Super Bowl and Mardi Gras.

Cantrell said security upgrades ahead of the Super Bowl, scheduled for Feb. 9, will begin Monday.

"Our mission remains to increase public safety as we move toward hosting major events in New Orleans," Cantrell said.

Day of mourning for each victim

Gov. Jeff Landry said he has spoken with family members of all 14 of those killed. Each victim will have a separate day of mourning from Monday through Jan. 23, Landry said, and families of those killed are being offered the state police escorts of the remains of their loved ones to local locations.

"We will continue to ensure that their tragic loss is not forgotten," Landry said. "We are committed to doing everything within our power to honor these victims, their families and friends."

Christopher Raia, the FBI deputy as-

sistant director of the agency's Counterterrorism Division, said the investigation continues to indicate the killer acted alone. More than 1,000 tips are being reviewed, and local, state and federal authorities will leave "no stone unturned" in efforts to learn everything about the killer and the attack, he said.

"We do this for the victims and their families, even though we know nothing we can do can take away their pain and grief," Raia said.

Carnival festivities start

Monday also marks the start of Carnival, which in Louisiana means weeks of parades, eating king cakes and crafting beads with the green, purple and gold color scheme ahead of Mardi Gras — French for "Fat Tuesday." The following day, Ash Wednesday, is the beginning of the holy season of Lent.

The most notable Carnival festivities are held in New Orleans, where Mardi Gras Day is an official holiday that the city has celebrated for centuries. At least six parades remain scheduled Monday, including two in the French Quarter neighborhood near where the attack took place on Bourbon Street.

Contributing: Joey Garrison, Anthony Robledo and Olivia Munson

Carter

Continued from Page 1A

defined his life and legacy.

In Plains, the tiny west Georgia town made famous by the peanut-farming former president, mourners laid flowers at a memorial that includes Habitat for Humanity hard hats with notes written on them. One said, "God bless you Mr. President."

The atmosphere on a chilly Saturday morning was warm as many locals and out-of-towners, some of whom lined up along Church Street hours before services, said they felt a connection to Carter.

LeAnne Smith, Carter's niece, was one of many locals remembering Carter downtown.

"Uncle Jimmy became governor, and one Thanksgiving, he said, 'I've got to tell y'all something,'" Smith said. "He said 'I'm gonna run for president,' and my dad said, 'President of what?' and he said, 'The United States.' And then we laughed and kept just fixing our plates."

Even some of those who didn't claim relation to the former president felt a deeply personal connection with Carter.

Naomi Richardson, the owner of a bed and breakfast in Richland, Georgia, said she remembers Carter and her grandfather being good friends.

"When my grandfather died, Jimmy knew secret service was going to be everywhere with him, and he was so respectful of that — he didn't come in the church (for the funeral), he just came right to the house to sit with us," Richardson said. "He ate with us, and all my friends at the funeral asked, 'Did you know Jimmy Carter is just ... in your den?'"

Those sentiments about Carter were a common refrain throughout the week, whether from heads of state or heads of families.

President Joe Biden, honoring his "dear friend" in the hours following Carter's death, commended the Nobel Peace Prize winner as a "model of what it means to live a life of meaning and purpose" and applauded how he treated people with respect.

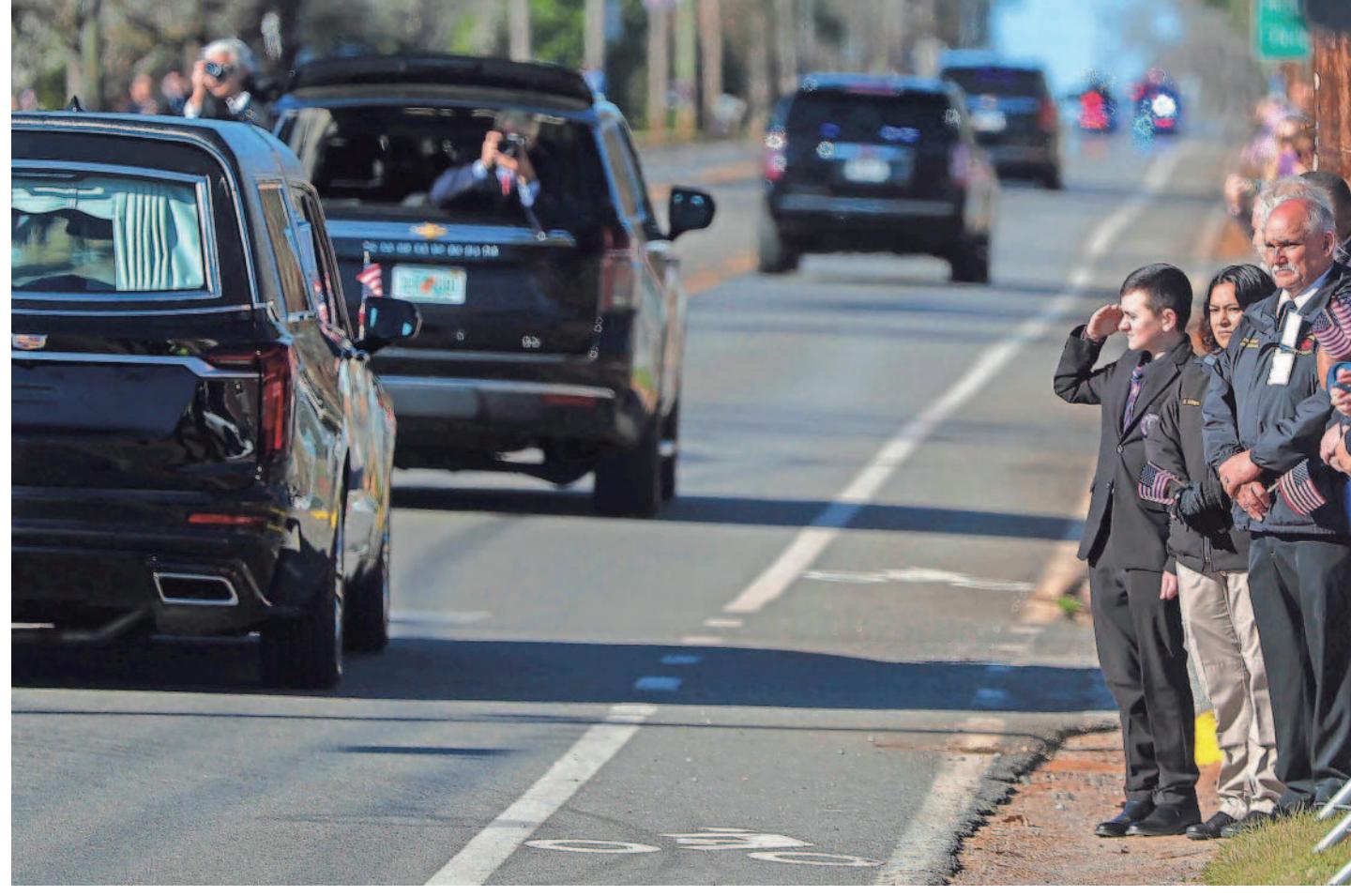
"Jimmy Carter is an example of just simple decency," Biden said. "And I think that's what the rest of the world looks to America for."

Biden added: "Can you imagine Jimmy Carter walking by someone that needs something and just keep walking? Can you imagine Jimmy Carter referring to someone by the way they look or the way they talk? I can't."

The procession to Atlanta on Saturday began in Plains and passed through Carter's boyhood home in Archery. There, the motorcade came to a stop in the remote area outside the Carter Boyhood Home & Farm as a National Park ranger rang a simple bell 39 times in honor of the 39th president. It was the same bell that rang every morning to get life started on the farm, Carter recalled in his memoir "An Hour Before Daylight."

Several hours later, Carter's funeral motorcade arrived at the Georgia Capitol in Atlanta where Gov. Brian Kemp, Atlanta Mayor Andre Dickens and other state and local leaders gathered for a moment of silence on the Capitol steps to honor the former president.

All along the 150-mile route from Plains to Atlanta, mourners gathered on the side of the road and along highway overpasses to pay their respects to the



A boy salutes as the hearse carrying former President Jimmy Carter travels Saturday through Plains, Ga. "There was a lot of love on the side of the road," said the president's son, James Earl "Chip" Carter III. RICHARD BURKHART/USA TODAY NETWORK

Honoring former President Jimmy Carter

Here is a schedule of events paying tribute to the 39th president this week.

Carter continues to lie in repose until 6 a.m. EST on Tuesday. The public is invited to pay their respects throughout this time.

Tuesday

A ceremony at 9:30 a.m. EST for the late former president at the Carter Center will precede the motorcade's departure for Dobbins Air Force Base, where Special Air Mission 39 will be waiting to travel to Washington, D.C.

The motorcade will travel at 1:15 p.m. to the U.S. Navy Memorial for a horse-drawn caisson to the U.S. Capitol at 2 p.m.

Congress will pay respects during a 3 p.m. ceremony in the U.S. Capitol rotunda.

Carter will lie in state from 7 p.m. to midnight for public viewing.

Wednesday

Carter will lie in state for public viewing from 7 a.m. Wednesday until 7 a.m. Thursday.

former president.

"There was a lot of love on the side of the road. It was amazing," the president's son, James Earl "Chip" Carter III, told mourners in Atlanta. "Gave me goosebumps just to sit in the van and see the reactions."

The motorcade then proceeded from the Capitol to the Carter Center where dignitaries were present, but speakers were limited to members of the Carter family. The private service at the non-governmental organization Jimmy and his wife, Rosalynn Carter, founded in 1982 was in many ways as much for the staff and supporters of the Carter Center as it was for the public watching around

Thursday

This day is dedicated by President Joe Biden as the national day of mourning for former President Jimmy Carter.

A 9 a.m. ceremony will take place at the U.S. Capitol as the motorcade departs for the Washington National Cathedral, where there will be a 9:30 a.m. arrival ceremony.

The National Funeral Service will take place at 10 a.m.

Following the funeral service, Carter's family will travel by motorcade to Joint Base Andrews for departure back to Georgia.

After arriving in Georgia, Carter and his family will travel by motorcade to Maranatha Baptist Church in Plains for a private funeral service at 3:45 p.m.

The family will travel by motorcade at 4:45 p.m. to the Carters' private residence for a private interment at 5:20 p.m.

the world.

The Carter Center ceremony began with the playing of "Hail to the Chief" and "America the Beautiful" as the former president's casket was moved inside, where a Morehouse College glee club sang hymns.

There will be ample opportunities to pay tribute to the former president this week, Carter's grandson, Jason Carter, said as the ceremony began, but there was a special reason the motorcade stopped at the Carter Center.

"His spirit fills this place. And the real

reason that his spirit fills this place is because of the people who are standing here," Jason Carter said. "You all are the real keepers of my grandparents' legacy."

Their story is an "unbelievable American story," Jason Carter said.

"We will spend this week celebrating this incredible life, and a life that I think we can all agree is as full and powerful as any life can be," Jason Carter said. "As someone said, 'It's amazing what you can cram into 100 years.'"

The services and celebrations of Carter's life this week reflect the humble man from Plains whose indelible mark went beyond the White House, something not lost on the mourners who lined the street in Plains on Saturday.

Keaymonda Hollis, who grew up in Plains, said that his grandfather was also close friends with Carter in his childhood and that Carter wrote about his grandfather as his "African American childhood friend" in one of his autobiographies.

"It's so amazing to me that a person from a small-town community can make such an impact on the world," Hollis said. "Small town people can make an impact wherever they go."

Carter is survived by his children, Jack, Chip, Jeff and Amy; 11 grandchildren; and 14 great-grandchildren. He was preceded in death by his wife of 77 years, Rosalynn, and one grandchild.

The former president was scheduled to lie in state for 24 hours at the U.S. Capitol before a national day of mourning Thursday that will see federal offices, the stock market and the U.S. Supreme Court close in conjunction with Carter's state funeral.

Following services Thursday in Washington, Carter will return to Plains to be buried in Lebanon Cemetery next to Rosalynn.

Sarah Clifton writes for the Montgomery Advertiser. Evan Lasseter writes for the Savannah Morning News.

Contributing: USA TODAY staff reporters

Green Beret was treated for depression

Officials: Cybertruck blast suspect had PTSD

Tom Vanden Brook
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON — The Army Green Beret suspected of triggering an explosion inside a Cybertruck and dying by suicide at the Trump International Hotel in Las Vegas had been receiving mental health treatment for depression as recently as December, a U.S. official said on Friday.

Master Sgt. Matthew Livesberger, a highly decorated Special Forces soldier, is believed to have rented the Tesla truck, driving it to the entrance of the hotel and touching off an explosion. Livesberger died of apparent self-inflicted gunshot wounds, according to au-



Livesberger

thorities. The military, especially the Army, has been hard-hit by suicide for years and has increased funding for behavioral health counseling.

Livesberger had made three visits for mental health treatment from August to December, according to the official who had been briefed on the matter but was not authorized to speak publicly. It's not clear if he had been deemed a risk for suicide or violence. He was 37.

Authorities Friday in Las Vegas said he had been suffering from post-traumatic stress and undisclosed personal issues.

The Army's Criminal Investigation Division is working with the FBI and local law enforcement in Las Vegas, pro-

viding medical records for Livesberger and other assistance, Sabrina Singh, the deputy Pentagon press secretary, told reporters on Friday.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin "has been closely monitoring both situations and has actively engaged in providing updates to the president and homeland security leaders as needed," Singh said.

President Joe Biden and others have said there is no evidence that the explosion was connected to the attack in New Orleans by an Army veteran that killed 14 people.

Livesberger's motive for the explosion and suicide remain unclear.

Late in 2024, the Army saw a decline in suicide among soldiers, a welcome sign after years of worrying increases. Through October, the Army had 23 fewer suicides among active duty soldiers compared with the same period in 2023.

Suicide totals for the Army also were below its five- and 10-year averages, he said.

In 2023, the Pentagon recorded 523 suicides across the services compared with 493 in 2022, according to its latest full-year figures.

Handguns are involved in about 3 in 4 deaths by suicide in the Army, prompting efforts by commanders to emphasize firearm safety.

Livesberger apparently died by a gunshot wound to his head.

The Pentagon has stressed the need to erase the stigma of seeking help for mental health issues.

"We encourage our service members, if you need help, if you feel that you need to seek any type of mental health treatment or just to talk to someone, to seek the services that are available either on base or online," Singh said.

Trump picks a former critic for key foreign policy role

Michael Collins
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON — Morgan Ortagus once called President-elect Donald Trump's behavior "disgusting" and suggested he had the temperament of a "middle school pubescent boy."

Now she's going to work for him. Again.

Trump announced Friday that he has — reluctantly, it seems — chosen Ortagus to serve as his deputy special envoy for Middle East peace. A Trump critic turned defender, Ortagus was the State Department spokeswoman for three years during his first term.

"Early on Morgan fought me for three years, but hopefully has learned her lesson," Trump said in a statement announcing the appointment.

Trump appeared to suggest he was appointing Ortagus only because she has strong support among his fellow Republicans.

"These things usually don't work out," Trump said, "but she has strong Republican support, and I'm not doing this for me, I'm doing it for them. Let's see what happens."



President-elect Trump has tapped Morgan Ortagus, a former Trump critic, as his deputy special envoy for Middle East peace. JOHN LAMPARSKI/GETTY IMAGES

Trump said he hopes Ortagus will be an asset to Steve Witkoff, whom he has chosen as his special envoy to the Middle East.

Before reinventing herself as a Trump supporter and working for his State Department, Ortagus worked as a

national security contributor to Fox News. A volunteer for Republican Jeb Bush's presidential campaign in 2016, Ortagus was a frequent Trump critic during that year's presidential primaries.

During an appearance on the cable

network in 2016, Ortagus criticized Trump what she called his "isolationist foreign policy approach."

That year, she suggested Trump's temperament made him unsuitable for the Oval Office.

"You have somebody who makes fun of people with mental and physical disabilities," she said during a Fox News radio interview. "That's disgusting. There's no other way around it."

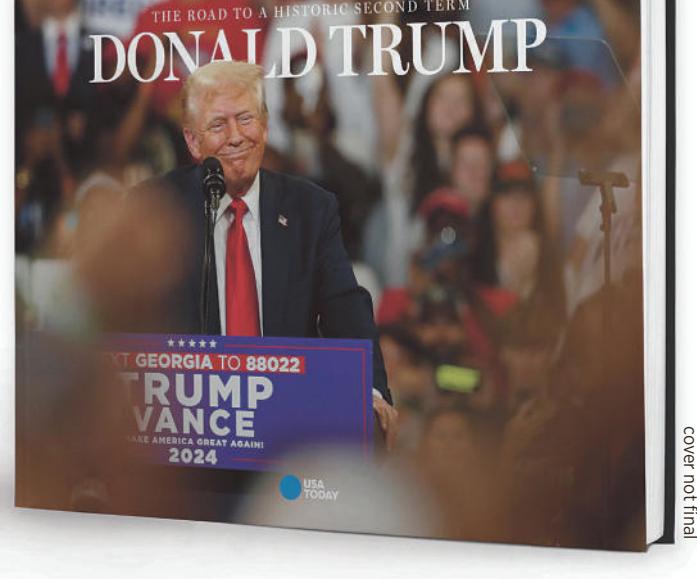
"Quite frankly, I don't want someone with the temperament of a middle school pubescent boy in the president's office," she said in the same interview.

Besides her work with the State Department, Ortagus has served as the public affairs officer for U.S. Agency for International Development under President George W. Bush. She also was an intelligence analyst for the Treasury Department and was the department's deputy attaché to Saudi Arabia under President Barack Obama.

Trump endorsed Ortagus when she ran for a Tennessee congressional seat in 2022, but the Tennessee Republican Party later removed her from the primary ballot because she had only recently moved to the state.

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Speaker

Continued from Page 1A

speaker's chair.

The nine-member threshold to trigger a vacating vote is a significantly higher margin than Johnson and his predecessor, former Speaker Kevin McCarthy, have had for the past two years. Under those insurgent-friendly rules, any single member could call a vote on the speakership.

But Friday's vote indicates there's still a significant cohort frustrated with Johnson, one that could plunge the chamber back into chaos.

Johnson has had to navigate small margins in a fractious conference over the past two years. One of his promises was not to pass catch-all year-end spending bills, which conservatives have long bemoaned as a grab bag of spending.

As a government shutdown approached late last month, Johnson struck a deal with Democrats to keep the government open. That deal collapsed after Trump and Elon Musk publicly opposed it, and a smaller funding bill was passed at the last moment.

If Johnson lost the speakership, it would be a major roadblock for Republicans seeking to take advantage of a GOP trifecta to pass President-elect Donald Trump's agenda: The House cannot do anything without a speaker, and a leadership loss would significantly delay policymaking. When McCarthy was ousted in October 2023, the House was paralyzed for three weeks before Republicans coalesced around Johnson.



Rep. Lisa McClain, R-Mich., hugs Rep. Mike Johnson, R-La., after she gave a speech to nominate him for speaker of the House. ELIZABETH FRANTZ/REUTERS

"Nobody wants to have a sword over their head. But we have a motion to vacate for a reason. He's been given a job, he's got to go do that job," said Rep. Andy Ogles, R-Tenn., a House Freedom Caucus member who joined 10 other members in voting for Johnson despite "sincere reservations" about his track record.

Asked whether a motion to vacate could get in the way of Trump's agenda by creating more chaos in the House, he said he doesn't think there's a "threat" on table, but added: "We don't work for a president, we work for the American people. We have a job to do."

In fact, lawmakers who protested Johnson argued the process was necessary to ensure he would adequately fight for Trump's agenda.

Johnson didn't make any concessions in order to secure the gavel. But after every member had voted, Johnson and Trump convinced the two remaining holdouts – Reps. Ralph Norman, R-S.C., and Keith Self, R-Texas – that Johnson was committed to Trump's priorities and to including more rank-and-file members in big decisions.

"Members are very focused on the president's agenda as it stood during the campaign, and they have concerns that that's not going to be enacted," said Rep. Scott Perry, R-Pa., who had questioned whether he would vote for Johnson but ultimately did so Friday. "He gave assurance that it will be."

Amid the negotiations, at least one member reminded Johnson that there's clearly a cohort that could call the motion to vacate, Norman told reporters.

He said there's little appetite at the moment for more upheaval, and that Johnson recognized the risk.

"I don't want to go through that process," Norman said. "I wanted to impress upon him that these were crucial key issues that we have to have. I think he gets that."

Republicans plan to implement much of Trump's agenda through one or more big bill packages. If done the typical way, most of his policies would hit a dead end in the Senate controlled 53-47 by Republicans, as 60 votes are needed to pass the vast majority of bills.

To get around that, Republicans plan to use a procedure called "reconciliation" to pass their tax and spending-related priorities with a simple majority vote – the same tool Democrats used to push through President Joe Biden's Inflation Reduction Act in 2022 and a COVID-19 stimulus bill in 2021.

Contributing: Sudiksha Kochi

Certification

Continued from Page 1A

in key swing states, but their colleagues rejected those objections.

On Monday, lawmakers will finalize the results of a presidential election for the first time since the attempted insurrection. This time, lawmakers will be overseeing the certification of Trump's return to power in a session led by his opponent, Vice President Kamala Harris.

But unlike Jan. 6, 2021, lawmakers on both sides of the aisle told USA TODAY they expect Jan. 6, 2025, to be uneventful.

"Jan. 6 is going to be nice and calm," said Rep. Troy Nehls, R-Texas, an avid supporter of the president-elect. He said he doesn't expect Democrats to oppose the results as Republicans did in 2021.

"It's not going to happen again. I think you're going to see peace," Nehls said. "Everybody's got a smile on the face. Trump is coming back. Everybody's happy."

Sen. Mark Kelly, D-Ariz., told USA TODAY he was in the Senate chamber four years ago when his twin brother, retired astronaut Scott Kelly, texted him that Trump's supporters were scaling the side of the building.

Shortly afterward, "we could hear that – we could hear the noise of people in the Capitol." He was sitting next to Sen. Cory Booker, D-N.J., and the pair could tell rioters had gotten inside the building from the sound.

This time, Kelly said he also thinks the day will "go rather smoothly."

"There were a lot of people who participated in the mayhem which realized that that was a mistake, and I think we'll certainly be better prepared



Supporters converge on the U.S. Capitol following a rally with President Donald Trump on Jan. 6, 2021, in Washington. SAMUEL CORUM/GETTY IMAGES

if anything was to go sideways," Kelly said. "But what we want to see is a peaceful transition of power."

The ceremony that takes place in Congress every four years on Jan. 6 is the final step in the Electoral College process.

The 2021 version was unusual in every respect, leading to Trump's second impeachment by the House and a historic set of federal criminal charges against the former president that were later dropped upon his election as president in 2024. It also continues to echo as Trump prepares to return as president promising to consider pardons for some of the more than 1,000 people who have been sentenced in the Capitol attack that injured 140 police officers.

Here's how things are set to work this time around: The Electoral College electors were chosen by each state on Election Day 2024, and the governor of each

state later sent a list of electors to the federal archivist. Electors met to cast their votes in each state in December.

Certificates of those votes are then sent to the President of the Senate – also known for purposes of this Jan. 6 as Harris.

On Monday, the House and Senate will come together in a joint session to open and read those certificates as dictated by the 12th Amendment to the Constitution. Each state's certificates are read alphabetically by state, starting with Alabama and ending with Wyoming. As each state is read out, lawmakers can object to the certificate.

That process was changed through the 2022 Electoral Count Reform Act, which raised the threshold for objection from just one senator and House member to 20% of each chamber of Congress – making it significantly harder for lawmakers to repeat the 2021 attempt to overturn the election results.

That law also clarified that the vice president does not have the power to accept or reject electors, and required Congress to accept only one official certificate of electors from states. The move came after Trump called on Pence to step in during the 2021 certification process, a power the former vice president insists he never held.

Neither party expects fireworks this year. The presidential election is expected to be finalized smoothly on Monday afternoon once the results are read, and Trump will prepare to be inaugurated on Jan. 20.

"The lingering memories that we have of the last Jan. 6 transition of power will certainly come back on this day. We all remember the searing scenes of rioters in the Capitol, the sounds and sights of that insurrection," said Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn. "It will be a sober day, but my hope is (it will be) uneventful."

Memories

Continued from Page 1A

2020 election was tainted by widespread fraud.

On Jan. 6, 2021, the day Congress was to certify the results of that election, Trump held a rally on the Ellipse with the White House in the background and urged thousands of his supporters to march down Pennsylvania Avenue to the Capitol and "fight like hell." They did, setting in motion the most violent attack against the seat of government since the War of 1812.

But Trump eagerly embraced the results of last year's election after he won both the popular vote and the Electoral College over the Democratic nominee, Vice President Kamala Harris. Though Trump had again warned of the possibility of election fraud, he went suddenly silent about those dire predictions after his victory.

Congressional Democrats are not expected to challenge the election results when they gather to certify them on Monday.

"I think it's safe to say that even the Democrats heard from the American people that this is what they wanted," said Sen. Markwayne Mullin, R-Oklahoma.

Even so, hanging over the certification process will be unsettling memories of the assault on the Capitol, uncertainty over whether Trump will follow through on his promise to pardon those involved and questions of how the Jan. 6, 2021, attack will be viewed through the broader lens of history.

"For a significant chunk of the population, including me, it will be remembered as a frightening attempt to use force to overrule the results of a presidential election," said Alexander Keyssar, a Harvard professor who taught a class on the Jan. 6 attacks.

For a different segment of the population, "it may be remembered as a day of courage and heroism," Keyssar said.

Will Trump issue Jan. 6 pardons?

Either way, Trump, who was impeached twice during his first term, will immediately earn a couple of places in the history books when he begins his second term on Jan. 20. He will be the first president since Grover Cleveland to leave office in defeat and return four years later. He also will become the first president to enter office with a criminal record after his conviction in New York last May on 34 felonies involving hush-money payments to a porn star.

Trump was indicted on federal charges tied to his mishandling of classified documents after he left office and his efforts to overturn the 2020 election leading up to the attack on the Capitol. But three weeks after last year's election, a judge acting on the request of special counsel Jack

Smith dismissed the charges that Trump tried to steal the election in 2020. Smith also effectively ended the classified documents case by dropping his appeal of a separate judge's dismissal of those charges.

Federal prosecutors did win the conviction of more than 1,000 people who were involved in the Jan. 6 attack. At least 645 were jailed and another 145 were serving home detention as of Dec. 6, according to the Justice Department.

Trump has vowed repeatedly for years to pardon defendants charged in the attack, leading some to ask judges to postpone trials, sentencing or incarceration until after he is inaugurated.

Some defendants have asked permission to attend the inauguration while awaiting trial.

Tommy Tatum of Mississippi, who was charged with using a flagpole to intimidate police at the Capitol, asked the court to let him travel to Washington on Jan. 6 to attend a news conference and on Jan. 20 to attend the inauguration.

"The Government is punishing Mr. Tatum by preventing him from attending a press conference as a journalist and from expressing his support for President Trump by attending his inauguration, clearly in violation of Mr. Tatum's First Amendment rights," Tatum's lawyers wrote in their request.

"There is no legitimate government objective to prevent Mr. Tatum from visiting D.C.," the lawyers argued.

U.S. District Judge John Bates of the District of Columbia didn't immediately rule on the request.

Trump hasn't spelled out what he will do. He voiced sympathy during the campaign for nonviolent offenders and decried long sentences. He hasn't detailed how he would weigh pardons for nearly 1,600 people charged and 1,000 people convicted in the riot, which has left his allies and critics waiting to see what he will do on his first day in office.

"The moment we win, we will rapidly review the cases of every political prisoner unjustly victimized by the Harris regime, and I will sign their pardons on Day One," he told a Wisconsin rally in September.

For Trump, pardoning the defendants would amount to the concluding chapter of the Jan. 6 saga, said Julian Zelizer, a history professor at Princeton University and the author of a book on Trump's first term as president.

"He survived all the prosecutions, and he survived the electoral threat that that posed to his future and to the MAGA future," Zelizer said. "Then he won reelection, and he won it with the popular vote and with all the swing states. A pardon is the final step, saying, 'You're free.'"

Congressional Democrats warn pardoning those involved in the Jan. 6 insurrection would send the wrong message.

"The pardon power should be used to correct procedural or substantive injustices," said Rep. Jamie Raskin, D-Md., and a former professor of constitutional

law.

"No one has identified any injustice in the prosecution of people who violently assaulted police officers, who were engaged in seditious conspiracy, which means conspiracy to overthrow the government of the United States," Raskin said. "I would view the promise of pardoning hundreds of convicted insurrectionists as a continuation of the assault on American constitutional democracy."

Rep. Seth Magaziner, D-R.I., said granting a pardon to the Jan. 6 defendants, particularly those who committed acts of violence, would send a signal that "violent law-breaking will be allowed as long as it is done under a MAGA banner."

"That would open the floodgates to chaos all across the country because there will be a whole lot of people out there, including deranged and violent individuals, who think that Donald Trump will give them a 'Get Out of Jail Free' card," Magaziner said.

Magaziner said he recognizes the vast majority of Trump supporters are peaceful, patriotic Americans, "but we're not talking about peaceful patriotic Americans when we talk about the Jan. 6 rioters. We're talking about criminals and many of whom committed acts of violence."

History's view of Jan. 6

For some lawmakers, Trump's threats to investigate, prosecute and imprison his perceived enemies are another cause for alarm. During a December interview with NBC's "Meet the Press," Trump said members of a congressional committee that spent 18 months investigating his role in the Jan. 6 insurrection should go to jail.

That's not how government works, Raskin said.

"The whole point of the American Constitution is we have no kings here," Raskin said. "We have no monarchs. We have no queens, no emperors. We don't put people in jail because the president doesn't like them."

Trump's return to power will likely result in a revisionist history in terms of how Jan. 6 is remembered among a segment of the American electorate, Keyssar said. In Trump's view and that of many of his supporters, he said, Trump's victory in November validated many of his grievances about the 2020 election.

"There's a large segment of the American population which equates democracy as the protection of the rights and powers for some people but not others – and, thus, it was legitimate to have this attack on the (election) procedures because the procedures were leading to the wrong outcome," Keyssar said.

In many ways, Keyssar said, it's reminiscent of how regional differences shaped Americans' understanding of the Civil War for more than a century and, in some cases, even today. "In the South," he said, "they continue to call it the war of northern aggression."

OPINION

Unlike 2021, don't expect pro-Trump rioters



David Plazas
Nashville Tennessean
USA TODAY NETWORK

On Monday, Congress will vote to certify the 2024 presidential election, but unlike four years ago, Republicans won't contest the results.

That's, of course, because their nominee, President-elect Donald Trump, won this time.

When President Joe Biden won in 2020, weeks of unsuccessful legal battles ensued, followed by a deadly riot at the U.S. Capitol instigated by a mob of Trump supporters who nearly derailed the solemn ceremony.

When the congressional members' votes were counted last time, all of Tennessee's Republican House members voted to object to one or more state vote counts and not to accept the will of the majority of the states.

Sens. Marsha Blackburn and Bill Hagedorn threatened to do the same prior to Jan. 6, 2021, but after the attack, they

experienced a change of heart.

It should not have taken an assault on the U.S. Congress to bring them to their senses.

On Nov. 5, Trump won 312 electoral votes to Vice President Kamala Harris' 226 tally.

I will be shocked if any Republican member of Congress brings up objections. They will vote "yes," and Harris will do her duty as president of the Senate to affirm the will of the senators and confirm Trump as president-elect and her successor, JD Vance, as vice president-elect. Some Democrats may object, but they won't have much of a leg to stand on.

VP Kamala Harris won't face chants like 'hang Mike Pence'

Unlike four years ago, Harris will likely not endure the threats her predecessor faced with rioters' demands to "hang Mike Pence," and Americans will be able to breathe a sigh of relief that a peaceful transfer of power is coming on Inauguration Day, Jan. 20.

It's sad, but the recent collective ac-

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Supporters of then-President Donald Trump, after attending his rally, flood the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.

THOMAS P. COSTELLO/USA TODAY NETWORK

may forever be buried like tomes in a school library that become victims of book bans.

Let it be a lesson we never repeat.

Look to Benjamin Franklin's wisdom on keeping a republic

After the approval of the U.S. Constitution on Sept. 17, 1787, prominent Philadelphia resident Elizabeth Willing Powel famously asked Founding Father Benjamin Franklin: "Well, Doctor, what have we got, a republic or a monarchy?"

"A republic, if you can keep it," Franklin replied.

Since then, the republic has endured more than 237 years with 46, soon to be 47, presidencies and no shortage of tumult in our United States.

Despite the fearmongering on social media and the polarization in our politics, the American republic will survive another four years if we are willing to keep it.

David Plazas is the director of opinion and engagement for the USA TODAY Network Tennessee, where this column originally appeared.

Republicans survived Biden. Democrats will weather Trump.



Cameron Smith
Opinion contributor
USA TODAY NETWORK

This Thanksgiving my family passionately debated the similarities between President-elect Donald Trump and the rise of Italian dictator Benito Mussolini.

Over dessert, I offered a \$1,000 bet to any takers that the United States of America will have a legitimate, democratic election on Nov. 7, 2028.

None of my Democratic family members took me up on the offer.

Republicans survived President Joe Biden's calamitous tenure in office. I'm confident Democrats will weather yet another Trump administration.

The concerns about Trump as an emerging fascist dictator aren't simply the feverish nightmare of the politically paranoid. Weeks before the presidential election, Trump's longest-serving White House chief of staff, retired Marine Corps Gen. John Kelly, voiced his concerns about his former boss to The New York Times.

"Certainly, the former president is in the far-right area, he's certainly an authoritarian, admires people who are dictators – he has said that. So he certainly falls into the general definition of fascist, for sure," Kelly said of Trump. "He certainly prefers the dictator approach to government."

Are Trump voters evil or too uneducated?

According to the Pew Research Center, the Democratic Party now holds a "13-point advantage (55% vs. 42%) among those with a bachelor's degree or more formal education."

Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce finds, "Higher education promotes independent thought, respect for diversity, and inquisitive assessment of evidence – all of which can counteract the unquestioning deference to authority that is characteristic of authoritarianism."

It's true that inflation in Austria and Germany during the 1920s provided fertile ground for Adolf Hitler's rise to power. Inflation in the United States has been a tremendous economic and political pain point for the past several years.

"They have promised military round-up. They've promised the gates of hell will reign on the enemies," Democratic pundit James Carville warned in October. "The Supreme Court has greenlighted it."

The obvious conclusion is that Trump's return can only mean America will be helmed by the next Mussolini, Hitler or worse. More important, those who allowed such a travesty to happen by voting for Trump in November are either overtly evil or too uneducated to understand the immense danger they've foisted upon our nation. For



The Trumps arrive at a New Year's Eve gala at their Mar-a-Lago Club in Palm Beach, Fla. EVA MARIE UZCATEGUI/GETTY IMAGES

some of us, America has failed.

If you're nodding your head in agreement, you should come back to reality and consider not leaving the country.

Assuming the victors of an election are uniformly evil or too dumb to agree with your politics is the height of arrogance and demonstrably false.

Since Trump arrived on the political scene, Democrats have said that America must believe everything Trump says as undisputed fact and simultaneously know that he doesn't mean much of what he says. We've actually had the experience of a prior Trump presidency and an intervening presidency that really undermines the authoritarian dictator narrative.

For all the years I've worked in and around politics, I have yet to meet a politician who didn't want his or her way on every issue. Some have the ability to reach a compromise, but most of them would rather not if given the option.

Trump has said ... a lot. Many of his comments have been hyperbolic, hurtful, untruthful and unnecessary. I'm not going to even begin defending such behavior. Nevertheless, Democrats have used Trump's extreme bluster as an excuse to engage in their own breathless fearmongering.

Americans will not be "rounded up" by our military regardless of their politics, sexual orientation or race. Our military officers swear an oath to "support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that (they) will bear true faith and allegiance to the same."

None is under obligation to obey orders that are facially unconstitutional.

Never mind the reality that sweeping roundups are logically insane and would be quite easy to identify, locate and thwart in our real-time social media environment.

America will indeed hold future consequential democratic elections. The Constitution and the civil liberties it protects will not be terminated.

Americans will speak truth to power no matter how much the political class hates it. We actually have more channels to do so than we have at any time in human history.

Hyperbole aside, Democrats lost an election for control of the federal government. Americans rejected the status quo in favor of material policy changes. Trump and Republicans must deliver on their campaign promises, and liberals will not enjoy it.

Democrats campaigned heavily on a one-policy-fits-all abortion approach at the federal level. They failed to capitalize politically even as abortion proponents repeatedly find success among the states. Americans clearly disagree on the existential question of when life is worth protecting.

The Constitution doesn't grant specific authority for the federal government to regulate the practice. Democrats will continue to clamor for centralized federal control of American life until they finally realize voters disagree.

Immigration is another point of contention between Democrats and Republicans. Democrats ran on largely maintaining the Biden administration's failed immigration policies and, again, lost on the issue.

Trump's own words undermine dictator narrative

Guidance from both the prior Trump and Biden administrations explicitly prohibits race-based immigration law enforcement, including race or ethnic "roundups," but nothing prevents the incoming administration from enforcing immigration law as written.

In spite of tough enforcement rhetoric, Trump has already signaled a willingness to work with Democrats on a permanent solution for so-called Dreamers who were brought illegally to the United States as children.

"Dreamers are going to come later, and we have to do something about the

Dreamers," Trump said in a "Meet the Press" interview last month, "because these are people that have been brought here at a very young age. And many of these are middle-aged people now, they don't even speak the language of their country."

Democrats also seem uniquely concerned that Trump and Republicans may reduce the size and power of the federal government.

"There's been nothing like what Trump is suggesting to do," presidential historian Doug Brinkley told The Associated Press. "We're talking about dismantling the federal government."

Don't tempt me with a good time.

According to Pew, "22% of Americans say they trust the government in Washington to do what is right 'just about always' (2%) or 'most of the time' (21%)."

What's crazy is those numbers are actually up from seven-decade lows in 2023. The United States must rein in the federal bureaucracy if only for the reason that the current trajectory is economically unsustainable and practically ungovernable.

Whether it's the Department of Government Efficiency, the Government Accountability Office or enterprise Americans with good ideas, the federal government is due for an overhaul. Republicans and Democrats alike should turn over the rocks, ask tough questions and do a better job with the public's trust and resources.

American patriots won't stand for stripping citizens' rights

Democrats won't love a Trump administration. I certainly couldn't stand the Biden-Harris administration, and I'm glad to see it come to an end.

That doesn't mean I won't stand shoulder to shoulder with Democrats to protect their rights, including their ability to disagree with me.

If Trump, Vice President JD Vance or any Republican starts trampling on the Constitution, I'll be the first in line to fight them.

Until then, Democrats, those of us on the other side of the political aisle don't want to hurt you or your families. We're not too stupid to fully appreciate Trump's virtues and vices.

We do want to chart a different course at the federal level. Hopefully, Trump, Republicans and a few Democrats will do just that.

In two years, we'll see those of you who don't leave the country at the polls for an electoral performance review.

I'd bet at least \$500 that election is real, too.

USA TODAY Network Tennessee columnist Cameron Smith is a recovering political attorney who worked for conservative Republicans. He and his wife are raising three boys in Nolensville. Direct outrage or agreement to smith.david.cameron@gmail.com or @DCameronSmith on X, formerly known as Twitter. This column originally appeared in The Tennessean.



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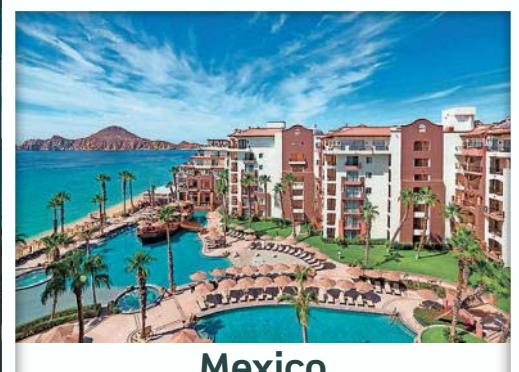
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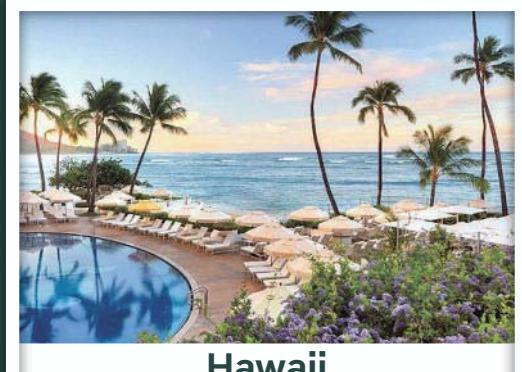
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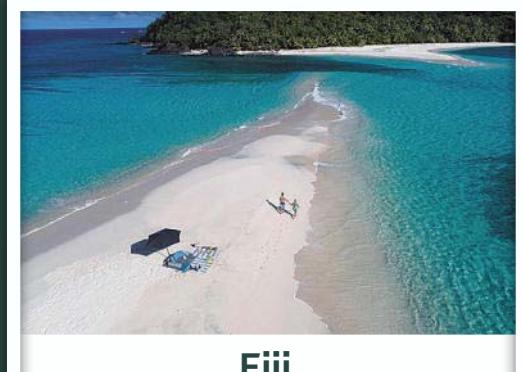
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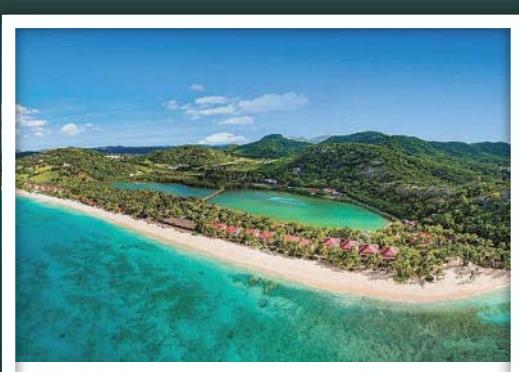
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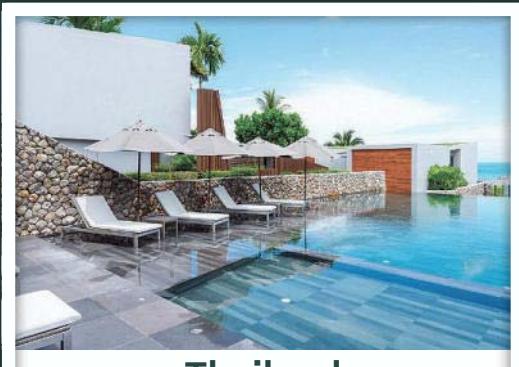
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Are you a bad parent when you travel with children?

When kids misbehave, maybe we shouldn't be quick to blame them. **Page 3B**

You can check the headlines from your home state or city

We survey and compile the top news stories from all 50 states plus Washington, D.C. **Page 4B**



People relax on the banks of the Vistula River during the final days of summer, with a panorama of Warsaw, Poland visible in the background on Sept. 8. WERONIKA KOWALSKA/NURPHOTO VIA GETTY IMAGES

Forget about Paris

7 affordable European destinations in 2025

Kathleen Wong USA TODAY

If visiting Europe is on your travel bucket list, then 2025 could be your year to make it happen.

There are a slew of destinations across the pond providing rich travel experiences without breaking the bank, according to data by Chase Travel. The travel booking and rewards platform recently released its first annual 25 trips to take in 2025, a list of must-visit travel spots informed by booking trends and in-house travel experts.

From perennial destinations like Amsterdam to rising stars such as Antwerp, Belgium, some European cities are offering affordable accommodations, flights, transportation and more this year.

Thinking outside the box from the classic Paris, London and Madrid is one major way travelers can save money on next year's Eurotrip. "The allure of lesser-known European locales like Antwerp, Belgium, and Warsaw, Poland, is growing, especially as these cities are often more budget-friendly," said Hillary Reinsberg, head of editorial for travel, lifestyle and dining at Chase.

Here are seven budget-friendly European destinations to visit in 2025.



Warsaw, Poland

Poland's capital has been underrated but invites travelers to explore its rich history, from the UNESCO-listed Old Town to the POLIN Museum, alongside an emerging arts and culture and green spaces.

"Warsaw has one of Europe's best nightlife scenes and some great new boutique hotels, all at a fraction of what you might pay in other cities," Reinsberg said. "According to Chase Travel data, traveling to Warsaw, including flights and accommodations, was approximately \$500 cheaper on average than traveling to Rome in 2024."

See EUROPE, Page 2B

A rooftop view of the district of Alfama, the Church of Santo Estevao and the Tagus river, in Lisbon, Portugal.
LHOTE L/ANDIA/ UNIVERSAL IMAGES GROUP VIA GETTY IMAGES

10 things you should never tell an AI chatbot



Tech Talk
Kim Komando

This is a heartbreaking story out of Florida. Megan Garcia thought her 14-year-old son was spending all his time playing video games. She had no idea he was having abusive, in-depth and sexual conversations with a chatbot powered by the app Character AI.

Sewell Setzer III stopped sleeping and his grades tanked. He ultimately committed suicide. Just seconds before his death, Megan says in a lawsuit, the bot told him, "Please come home to me as soon as possible, my love." The boy asked, "What if I told you I could come home right now?" His Character AI bot answered, "Please do, my sweet king."

You have to be smart

Artificial intelligence bots are owned



by tech companies known for exploiting our trusting human nature, and they're designed using algorithms that drive their profits. There are no guardrails or laws governing what they can and can-

not do with the information they gather. When you're using a chatbot, it's going to know a lot about you when you fire up the app or site. From your IP address, it gathers information about

When you're using a chatbot, it's going to know a lot about you when you fire up the app or site. The best way to protect yourself is to be careful about what info you offer up.
GETTY IMAGES

where you live, plus it tracks things you've searched for online and accesses any other permissions you've granted when you signed the chatbot's terms and conditions.

The best way to protect yourself is to be careful about what info you offer up.

10 things not to say to AI

Passwords or login credentials: A major privacy mistake. If someone gets access, they can take over your accounts in seconds.

Your name, address, or phone number: Chatbots aren't designed to handle personally identifiable info. Once shared, you can't control where it ends up or who sees it. Plug in a fake name if you want!

Sensitive financial information: Never include bank account numbers, credit card details, or other money matters in docs or text you upload. AI tools

See KOMANDO, Page 2B

Not all 'forever' documents are equal

Some records you should never throw out

Daniel de Visé
USA TODAY

As you ransacked your basement in search of holiday decorations, perhaps you came upon boxes of documents from the last millennium. And then you probably asked yourself: "Couldn't I just throw these out?"

Companies and governments often have document retention policies. Most people do not.

Common wisdom suggests we keep important papers for seven years, for reasons that, we vaguely recall, have something to do with taxes.

For those of us with paper records dating to the Clinton administration, that would seem to mean you can throw them away.

But does that mean everything?

We posed those questions to accountants and tax experts. Here's what they told us.

Tax returns

Let's start with the tax return, a near-universal document that fulfills our annual duty to Uncle Sam.

"The IRS can audit you for no reason, or any reason, for three years from the date you filed your return," said Paul Mendelsohn, a CPA in Livingston, New Jersey.

"The IRS has more time," beyond the three years, "if you pay late, file an amended return, file a fraudulent return or leave out income that is at least 25% of what you reported," he said.

The seven-year rule exists, in part, because the IRS "typically has up to six years to audit your return if there's a big issue, like unreported income," said Mark Gallegos, a CPA in Chicago. The seventh year "is just a buffer."

There are cases, though, in which even seven years is not long enough.

Example: There is no time limit for going after people who file a fraudulent tax return, or no return at all.

"If you never filed a tax return, the statute never starts, so you'd have to keep records indefinitely," said Scott Brillhart, a CPA in Chicago.

Bottom line: Keep your tax returns for at least seven years, if not forever.

Tax supporting documents

The documents you file with your tax return or use to prepare it, including W-2 forms, 1099s, receipts and expense records, "can usually be tossed after seven years," Gallegos said.

In fact, most of us won't need the supporting documents for more than three years, Mendelsohn said.

And so, at a minimum, keep those records "for three years from the date you filed your original return, or two

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Documents

Continued from Page 1B

years from the date you paid the tax, whichever is later," he said.

Bottom line: Keep supporting tax documents for at least three years, and ideally for seven.

Bank and credit card statements

It's not hard to fill a box with old bank and credit card statements, pay stubs and other number-intense documents from financial institutions.

Those "can be shredded after a year, unless you are keeping them for tax purposes," Mendelsohn said.

Michelle Crumm, a certified financial planner and tax expert in Ann Arbor, Michigan, advises clients to keep bank and credit card records for a full seven years.

"Keep a digital copy if you are worried about never having access again," she said.

Bottom line: Keep bank and credit card statements for at least a year, and arguably for seven.

Property and investment records

Here's an exception to the seven-year rule. Think of it as seven years plus.

If you own a home, or another investment asset, the attendant documents "need to stick around while you own the property," or the investment, "and for at least seven years after you sell it," Gallegos said.

"Keep a digital copy if you are worried about never having access again."

Michelle Crumm

Certified financial planner and tax expert in Ann Arbor, Michigan

The reason: "These records are key for figuring out your cost basis, which impacts how much tax you might owe when you sell," he said.

Cost basis is the original value of an asset, calculated for tax purposes, according to the financial journalism site Investopedia. That value helps determine the capital gain, which is the difference between the cost basis and the asset's current market value.

"Safeguard the deed to your house, title to the car, your mortgage," or car lease or loan, "as long as you own the property," Mendelsohn said.

Bottom line: Keep property and investment records while you own the assets and, ideally, for seven years after you sell.

Retirement account records

The seven-years-plus rule applies to these documents, as well, Gallegos said. "Hold on to records for your IRA or 401(k) as long as the account is active and for seven years after it's closed," he said. "They're important for making sure distributions are reported correctly."

Retirement account distributions (i.e., withdrawals) go on your tax return. Some are taxed; some are not. Either way, you'll want to keep the records. Bottom line: Keep retirement account records while the account is open and for seven years after it's closed.

Other 'forever' documents

Crumm, the Michigan tax expert, lists several types of records her clients should never throw away. Among them: adoption papers, birth certificates, death certificates, divorce decrees, lawsuits, marriage certificates, diplomas and school transcripts, health and immunization records, and Social Security cards. If you have estate or gift tax records, Gallegos says, you should keep them forever.

Documents to keep until a new one arrives

Some records are redundant. When you receive a new property tax assessment, it's probably safe to toss the old one, Crumm said.

Other documents you can safely shred when you get a new one: credit reports, Social Security statements and vehicle registrations.

Anything else

If you have an old document that isn't mentioned above, Mendelsohn said, you're probably safe following the seven-year rule.

There are exceptions. If you own a business, failed to file a tax return or get sued, you may wish you held on to every shred of associated paper.

Otherwise, it can probably go.

JetBlue hit with \$2 million fine for having chronic flight delays

Josh Rivera
USA TODAY

The U.S. Department of Transportation has imposed a \$2 million penalty on JetBlue Airways for operating multiple chronically delayed flights, marking the department's first-ever enforcement action against an airline for unrealistic scheduling.

The fine addresses flights that consistently arrived more than 30 minutes late over several consecutive months, a practice the Transportation Department says misleads passengers and distorts competition in the airline industry. The investigation revealed JetBlue operated four chronically delayed routes at least 145 times between June 2022 and November 2023.

"Illegal chronic flight delays make flying unreliable for travelers. Today's action puts the entire airline industry on notice that we expect their flight schedules to reflect reality," Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg said in a statement. "The department will enforce the law against airlines with chronic delays or other unrealistic scheduling practices in order to protect healthy competition in commercial aviation and ensure passengers are treated fairly."

JetBlue's delayed routes included



The U.S. Department of Transportation has imposed a \$2 million penalty on JetBlue Airways. JEENAH MOON/REUTERS

flights between New York's JFK Airport and Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina, as well as routes connecting Fort Lauderdale, Florida, to Orlando, Windsor Locks, Connecticut, and JFK.

Under the penalty, JetBlue must pay \$1 million to the U.S. Treasury and use the remaining \$1 million to compensate passengers. Customers will receive at least \$75 if they experience any future JetBlue delays of three hours or more within the next year.

"We appreciate how important it is to our customers to arrive to their destinations on-time and work very hard to operate our flights as scheduled," JetBlue

said in a statement. "While we've reached a settlement to resolve this matter regarding four flights in 2022 and 2023, we believe accountability for reliable air travel equally lies with the U.S. government, which operates our nation's air traffic control system. We believe the U.S. should have the safest, most efficient, and advanced air traffic control system in the world, and we urge the incoming administration to prioritize modernizing outdated ATC technology and addressing chronic air traffic controller staffing shortages to reduce ATC delays that affect millions of air travelers each year."

The airline also highlighted that over the past two years, it has invested "tens of millions of dollars to reduce flight delays, particularly related to ongoing air traffic control (ATC) challenges in our largest markets in the Northeast and Florida."

The enforcement is part of a broader crackdown on airline practices under the Biden administration. The Transportation Department has rolled out new rules to improve passenger protections, including automatic cash refunds for significant delays and bans on surprise junk fees.

The Transportation Department also is investigating other airlines for similar scheduling practices.

Europe

Continued from Page 1B

Antwerp, Belgium

As Belgium's second-largest city, Antwerp may be overshadowed by Brussels, but that gives it more of a low-key, laid-back vibe. It also boasts a rich history of creativity, with many designers and artists calling this port city home. Visitors can meander the colorful street art before exploring the Museum Plantin-Moretus, a UNESCO World Heritage Site dedicated to the history of printing, and the ModeMuseum, which celebrates Antwerp's influential fashion scene.

"Antwerp is a design hub that's perfect for travelers excited about architecture, design, fashion, and food," Reinsberg said. "With smaller crowds, it's all easy to access and easy to get around. Antwerp is a great answer for those stressed out by overtourism, and that's why we named it a must-visit global destination for 2025."

Lisbon, Portugal

Lisbon is quickly becoming a favorite European destination, combining picturesque pastel-colored architecture and cobblestone streets with a relaxed, seaside atmosphere. The city is also still pretty budget-friendly for travelers; the average hotel cost in Lisbon is about \$300 a night, according to Chase Travel booking data for 2025.

"Lisbon's charming neighborhoods and scenic tram rides are great for a budget-friendly adventure, with delicious pastries, an endless array of cool wine bars, and stunning views that won't break the bank," Reinsberg said.

Dublin, Ireland

Dublin is known for its old-world charm, including a storied literary and musical past. Thanks to its walkability, travelers can easily explore landmarks like the Abbey Theatre – Ireland's national theater – and the Dub-



Spectacular Brennisteinsfjöll volcanic mountains and Kleifarvatn lake on Reykjanes peninsula, in Reykjavik, Iceland. TIM GRAHAM/GETTY IMAGES

lin Writers Museum. Travelers can experience the city's lively pub culture, explore historic sites and take free walking tours, Reinsberg said.

"Chase Travel booking data also shows that in Dublin the average hotel cost has slightly decreased year-over-year," Reinsberg added.

Amsterdam, Netherlands

Amsterdam has been pushing back on overtourism with Europe's highest tourist tax, but respectful and responsible travelers can find ways to enjoy the city without hurting their bank accounts, like visiting during the off-season when it's less crowded. "Travelers can explore Amsterdam's picturesque canals on a budget, with affordable bike rentals and free-entry museums on select days," Reinsberg said.

Reykjavik, Iceland

Known as a safe, friendly and walkable city, Reykjavik is also notorious for being rather expensive when it comes to hotels, food and drink. Still, there are ways to save on a trip to the Land of Fire and Ice. "Travelers can take advantage

of relatively affordable (and quick!) flights and put their budget toward exploring the natural beauty of Iceland," Reinsberg said. A direct flight from the West Coast is about eight hours. "Reykjavik also has a number of budget-friendly hostels and free geothermal pools."

The Athens Riviera, Greece

If going to Greece sounds like a luxe kind of trip, then think again. "While island-hopping around Greece can be expensive, travelers might be interested to learn about the Athens Riviera and its beautiful beaches and lively seaside dining scene, no ferries or extra flights required," Reinsberg said. Less than an hour away from the city by car, the Athens Riviera offers similar beautiful beaches, oceanfront resorts and waterfront cafes to islands like Santorini, Crete and Paros.

Though some areas are more upscale and pricey, finding affordable accommodations and avoiding the peak summer season can keep costs lower. "With lots of new development in the area, it was another of our must-visit destinations for 2025," Reinsberg said.

Komando

Continued from Page 1B

aren't secure vaults – treat them like a crowded room.

Medical or health data: AI isn't Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act-compliant, so redact your name and other identifying info if you ask AI for health advice. Your privacy is worth more than quick answers.

Asking for illegal advice: That's against every bot's terms of service. You'll probably get flagged. Plus, you might end up with more trouble than you bargained for.

Hate speech or harmful content: This, too, can get you banned. No chatbot is a free pass to spread negativity or harm others.

Confidential work or business info: Proprietary data, client details and trade secrets are all no-nos.

Security question answers: Sharing them is like opening the front door to all your accounts at once.

Explicit content: Keep it PG. Most chatbots filter this stuff, so anything inappropriate could get you banned, too.

Other people's personal info: Uploading this isn't only a breach of trust; it's a breach of data protection laws, too. Sharing private info without permission could land you in legal hot water.

Reclaim a (tiny) bit of privacy

Most chatbots require you to create an account. If you make one, don't use login options like "Login with Google" or "Connect with Facebook." Use your email address instead to create a truly unique login.

FYI, with a free ChatGPT or Perplexity account, you can turn off memory features in the app settings that remember everything you type in. For Google Gemini, you need a paid account to do

this.

No matter what, follow this rule

Don't tell a chatbot anything you wouldn't want made public. Trust me, I know it's hard.

Even I find myself talking to ChatGPT like it's a person. I say things like, "You can do better with that answer" or "Thanks for the help!" It's easy to think your bot is a trusted ally, but it's definitely not. It's a data-collecting tool like any other.

The views and opinions expressed in this column are the author's and do not necessarily reflect those of USA TODAY. Learn about all the latest technology on the Kim Komando Show, the nation's largest weekend radio talk show. Kim takes calls and dispenses advice on today's digital lifestyle, from smartphones and tablets to online privacy and data hacks.

For her daily tips, free newsletters and more, visit her website.



ILLUSTRATION BY DUSTIN ELLIOTT

Are you a bad parent when you travel?

When kids misbehave, maybe we shouldn't be quick to blame them



On Travel
Christopher Elliott
USA TODAY

What happens when bad parents take their kids on a plane? Maybe you get the bizarre incidents I saw in a Scandinavian airport a few weeks ago.

One toddler was sprawled across the terminal floor while Mom tried to politely negotiate with him to return to his stroller. There was a child sternly lecturing two adults – probably his parents – as they listened deferentially. And, of course, there was the screaming infant in the back of economy class on Scandinavian Airlines, and no one tried to do a thing about it.

The experience made me wonder: Are bad children a problem in travel? Or are bad parents?

I'll have the correct answer in a moment. But first, let's push the rewind button. Last year I pointed out that the problem of free-range children at the airport had taken a turn for the worse. And this past summer, we had plenty of naughty children who traveled besides the ones I met in Europe. They include a boy who stubbornly refused to buckle his seat belt and caused a one-hour delay on a flight from Santa Marta, Colombia, to Bogota, and a toddler who cried so much on a flight in China that strangers locked her in the toilet to "educate" her. You can't help but wonder where the parents are in all this.

There's a simple solution

Well, it turns out there are ways of telling if parents are the problem – and of fixing it. At least, that's what parenting experts tell me.

But before I go on, a quick disclaimer: Flying with kids is often difficult and stressful, and as a father of three myself, I know that firsthand. When you see a parent outnumbered and frazzled at the airport, they usually deserve your empathy and support.

But not always. Let's get back to that Nordic airport. Call me old-fashioned, but this dad has an easy solution to the misbehaving kids. You scoop your little snowflake off the terminal floor and strap him back into his stroller, where he can resume his tantrum – and you can get to your gate on time. The lecturing kid? That's funny, but I always thought it was the parents who got to do the talking.

And the infant having a meltdown? Maybe the Chinese have the right idea. (I'm kidding.) Give the kid a toy or something to eat. I mean, you can't eat and scream at the same time, right?

Are you a bad parent when you travel?

If you're a parent who is planning to fly somewhere with children soon, here are a few questions that will help you determine whether you require some remedial parenting help.

• **Are you clearly communicating your expectations?** "Setting clear expectations about behavior can help mitigate issues before they arise," said Carla Bevins, who teaches business management communication at Carnegie Mellon University's Tepper School of Business. In other words, if you're not modeling appropriate behavior to your kids, then how can they ever know how to behave? By the way, the same thing applies to passengers seated next to a child who has a hissy fit. Bevins says ef-

fective communication means using body language, tone and words that express patience and understanding. "A smile, a knowing nod, or simply making space for a parent struggling with bags and a stroller are small but powerful gestures that show empathy and solidarity," she said.

• **Are you letting your kids cross the line?** "Should parents let their child ride a luggage carousel? Run around the airport unattended or race through the airplane?" asked Jason Seacat, professor of psychology at Western New England University in Springfield, Massachusetts. "No." Some lines shouldn't be crossed. Seacat is quick to add that parenting can be stressful and that passengers should be understanding when a parent gets distracted and allows a toddler to cross a line by accident. But if a parent doesn't care if the line gets crossed – well, that's a no-no.

• **Are you getting unsolicited parenting advice?** That might be a red flag, said Karlee Vincent, author of "Pump or Bust," a book to help traveling moms return to work after parental leave. "You know pretty quickly if you become the problem as a parent when other travelers start inserting their opinions without trying to help," she said. She recalled a flight with her daughters, ages 6 and 10, when they started fighting at a security screening area over a tray with someone else's stuff in it. In the scuffle, the tray went flying off the conveyor belt to the ground.

Yep, sometimes parents are the problem

Here's my takeaway from all this: When kids misbehave on a plane, maybe we shouldn't be so quick to blame them. Maybe we should be holding their parents accountable.

If only we could agree on what constitutes appropriate parenting. Thomas Plante, a psychology professor at Santa Clara University, says we live in a world where there's a wide variety of approaches, including the ones I witnessed in Scandinavia.

"Some parents are completely hands-off and not that concerned when kids misbehave while traveling," he said. "Others are very attentive and perhaps even controlling. It is easy to get very frustrated and angry with parents when their parenting style doesn't match your own."

Still, it's a debate worth having, even if some of my readers don't want to have it. When Eileen Gunn, who edits the family travel website Families-Go!, heard I was working on a story about bad parenting and travel, I got a scolding.

"I'm dismayed and disappointed," she told me in an email. "Articles like the one that you seem to be working on help make it easier for people to think kids and parents are fair game. Parents and grandparents trying to travel with kids have it hard enough without a major syndicated columnist shaming them."

I'm not so sure about that. As a parent myself, I can tell you that no article would have stopped me from booking a flight with my young – and not always so well-behaved – kids. I suspect that's true for her, too. And for you.

So whether you're a permissive parent or a strict parent, do the rest of your passengers a favor when you get to the airport during the holidays: Please mind your kids.

Trump makes plan for bitcoin

Pros and cons to how a federal bitcoin reserve would work

Bailey Schulz USA TODAY

Bitcoin prices have been climbing this year thanks in part to President-elect Donald Trump's messaging on creating a crypto-friendly administration – including plans to stockpile the volatile digital currency.

At a conference in July, Trump said hanging on to the country's bitcoin holdings would create "a permanent national asset to benefit all Americans" and help make the United States a leader in the global cryptocurrency space. Some are pushing the upcoming administration to go a step further by creating a bitcoin strategic reserve, arguing that building up the country's cryptocurrency assets would help the government pay down its debt.

Here's what we know about Trump's plans for a crypto stockpile and what it might mean for taxpayers.

How a bitcoin stockpile would work

The United States already owns nearly \$20 billion worth of bitcoin obtained through legal seizures, according to crypto tracking firm Arkham Intelligence.

Federal officials will occasionally sell off the cryptocurrency, but Trump has expressed interest in halting future sales to create a "core" stockpile of bitcoin.

"For too long, our government has violated the cardinal rule that every bitcoiner knows by heart: Never sell your bitcoin," Trump said in July.

By the end of 2024, bitcoin's price was up more than 100%. By avoiding future selloffs, the U.S. could help keep bitcoin prices elevated, benefitting current investors.

"If you constrain supply in the overall, real-time market, then it does help to not suppress the price," said Seoyoung Kim, author of "DeFi For Dummies" and associate professor of finance at Santa Clara University.

But some believe the government needs to do more than simply hold on to its crypto and are pushing for a bitcoin strategic reserve similar to the reserves of gold and oil held by the U.S. government.

Republican Sen. Cynthia Lummis of Wyoming has introduced a bill that would have the country acquire, over time, 1 million bitcoin, or about 5% of outstanding tokens, to hold for at least 20 years. To fund the purchase, the government would revalue about \$1 billion worth of gold certificates on the Federal Reserve's balance sheets.

Lummis said establishing a bitcoin reserve could help the U.S. chip away at its \$36 trillion national debt and strengthen the U.S. dollar.

"While there may be short-term volatility, over the long term a bitcoin reserve like this will serve as an important and stable store of value," Lummis wrote in a letter published in The Wall Street Journal.

Trump has suggested a bitcoin reserve would help the U.S. compete with other countries in the cryptocurrency space.

"We're going to do something great with crypto because we don't want China or anybody else – and not just China, but others are embracing it – and we want to be the head," Trump told CNBC last month.

Other countries with significant bitcoin holdings as of last week include China (\$18.5 billion), the United Kingdom (\$6 billion), Ukraine (\$4.5 billion), Bhutan (\$1 billion) and El Salvador (\$582 million), according to data site BitcoinTreasuries.

But some cryptocurrency experts say the U.S. doesn't need a strategic reserve to stay competitive.

"I would rather see regulatory clarity around all digital assets moving forward. To me, that benefits the United States economy even more than possibly holding a volatile asset in reserve," said Michele Neitz, visiting professor at the University of San Francisco and founding director of the Center for Law, Tech, and Social Good.

What are the risks of having a bitcoin reserve?

Owen Lau, a senior analyst at Oppenheimer & Co., said creating a stockpile would be easy for the president; the government would simply stop selling off its bitcoin. Funding a strategic reserve, however, would likely require Congress' approval – and he believes the probability of that happening is low.

"I just have not heard enough support for creating something like that," he said. "Taking (the idea of a stockpile) a step further to actively buy and sell bitcoin would be quite risky and harder to justify to the public."

There are concerns over crypto wallets being vulnerable to cyberattacks and bitcoin's price falling. Though the digital currency is hovering near record highs, it has taken dramatic tumbles in the past – for instance, falling more than 70% between November 2021 and November 2022.

"If bitcoin goes up, you benefit from it. If bitcoin goes down, the taxpayer will lose value on that trade," Lau said.

A Barclays analysis said funding a bitcoin strategic reserve probably would require the issuance of new treasury debt, according to Reuters. The bank suspects such a plan to "face stiff resistance from the Fed."

When asked about a bitcoin reserve at a news conference, Fed Chair Jerome Powell said last month that the central bank is not looking to hold bitcoin.

"We're not allowed to own bitcoin. The Federal Reserve Act says what we can own, and we're not looking for a law change," Powell said. "That's the kind of thing for Congress to consider, but we are not looking for a law change at the Fed."

50★States

News from across the USA

ALABAMA Attala: Etowah High School's Jobs for America's Graduates program donated 1,063 pairs of socks to Gadsden's Salvation Army Hope Center as part of a statewide drive.

ALASKA Juneau: The Biden administration said it would delay a planned sale of oil and gas leases in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge by one day because of a planned day of mourning for former President Jimmy Carter, who died on Dec. 29. The Bureau of Land Management said it would read sale bids on Jan. 10, a day later than previously announced.

ARIZONA Phoenix: Money to tutor students who fell behind academically during the pandemic has reportedly run out, causing the state Department of Education to cancel free tutoring sessions suddenly.

ARKANSAS Little Rock: Police said one person was killed and two others were injured after a shooting on New Year's Day, KARK reported.

CALIFORNIA Sacramento: Insurance officials announced a new regulation intended to increase the availability of home insurance for Californians living in areas facing increased risks of wildfires and other potential disasters related to climate change.

COLORADO Denver: Colorado's cost to compensate ranchers for wolf depredations is expected to far exceed what was budgeted in 2024, the first year after the predator was reintroduced into the state.

CONNECTICUT New Haven: A federal judge in Connecticut refused to dismiss a long-running lawsuit accusing the former Nestle Waters North America of defrauding consumers by labeling its Poland Spring bottled water as "spring water."

DELAWARE Dover: Delaware is the least overworked state in the U.S., according to data analysis by the Washington-based Phillips Law Firm. Researchers looked at data collected by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2024 and 2014 to determine which states worked the most and least hours, with the First State coming out on the bottom.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA Washington: United States Attorney for the District of Columbia Matthew Graves has announced that he will resign on Jan. 16, just days before the presidential inauguration, WUSA and DC News Now reported.

FLORIDA Tallahassee: A Florida lawmaker filed a bill that would make a felony out of committing animal cruelty during a state of emergency.

GEORGIA Atlanta: Around 1.7 million Georgians owe a collective \$70.1 billion in student loans. Georgia has the greatest amount of student debt out of any state in the South and the third highest nationally. After years of federal repayment pauses and attempts at widespread forgiveness, many are wondering what student loans will look like under Donald Trump's upcoming second term.

HAWAII Honolulu: Hawaiian Electric Industries said last week it had closed the deal to sell a 90.1% stake in its unit American Savings Bank, helping the company raise funds for the deadly 2023 Maui wildfire settlement.

IDAHO Payette: Officials said a man was arrested after footprints in the snow led police to a train car where they found an explosive device, KTVB reported.

ILLINOIS Mount Prospect: Eleven teenage boys in Illinois have been charged with several felonies for allegedly using an online dating app to lure unsuspecting men to meetups and beating them, police said.

INDIANA Indianapolis: Indiana's last remaining habitat for one of the world's rarest butterfly species is now permanently protected thanks to the quick work of a local conservation group. Central Indiana Land Trust purchased the unique 13-acre wetland habitat in northern Indiana just south of the Michigan border – home to the endangered Mitchell's satyr butterfly – for \$380,000 from private owners. The trust will hold the property until the Indiana Department of Natural Resources can put the money together to buy the land.

IOWA Des Moines: State officials have agreed to temporarily postpone enforcement of a new law regulating e-cigarettes and related products in response to a lawsuit claiming the statute is unconstitutional.

HIGHLIGHT: WISCONSIN



Candy and Rush Evans spotted a white wagtail bird, a rare species common in Europe and Asia but rarely found in North America. PROVIDED BY RUSH EVANS

Sturgeon Bay: Embarking for their daily visit to look for birds at Portage Park in Sturgeon Bay, Candy and Rush Evans didn't expect to see anything out of the ordinary. Perched on a rock overlooking Lake Michigan was a small gray, white and black bird with a rounded belly and long legs. The Evanses rushed to their car and pulled out a field guide. It revealed they had spotted a white wagtail, a species common in Europe and Asia but rarely found in North America. The Dec. 28 sighting of the white wagtail marked the first time the species has ever been seen in Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology later confirmed.

KANSAS Topeka: The monthlong trash pileups with overflowing dumpsters at Topeka rental units during the holiday season stemmed from a contractual dispute between the Oklahoma-based landlord and its waste management company, according to a federal lawsuit.

KENTUCKY Louisville: The Louisville Metro Office for Immigrant Affairs predicts the immigrant share of Jefferson County's population could jump to 18.3% by 2040. As the number of immigrants living in Louisville grows, so does the number of immigrants in need of legal services, which is part of why the University of Louisville's Brandeis School of Law established a clinic that provides free immigration law services.

LOUISIANA Bossier City: Live! Casino and Hotel Louisiana will open on Feb. 13 after a nearly \$300 million transformation of the former Diamond Jacks Casino.

MAINE Augusta: The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Health Resources and Services Administration has awarded a three-year grant to MaineHealth to help create new obstetric training opportunities in rural communities, News Center Maine reported.

MARYLAND Annapolis: Sen. Richard Colburn, who represented the Eastern Shore for 20 years, has died at the age of 74.

MASSACHUSETTS New Bedford: The over 120-year-old New Bedford-Fairhaven Bridge will be going from "swing" to "vertical lift" when it's replaced, according to state plans. That is, instead of opening by swinging horizontally, a section will be raised to allow vessels to pass underneath.

MICHIGAN Escanaba: A common soil fungus sickened more than 150 Michigan paper mill workers, and killed one, in what health officials called the largest such outbreak in U.S. history, but the exact cause remains elusive, they said. The Centers for Disease Control said a 2022-23 outbreak of blastomycosis at Escanaba's Billerud Paper infected at least 162 people from November 2022 to May 2023.

MINNESOTA Minneapolis: A Minnesota tattoo artist and human remains aficionado was sentenced to 15 months in prison for adding the stolen corpse of a stillborn baby boy to his collection, among other smuggled body parts, federal officials announced.

MISSISSIPPI Jackson: Nearly half a million retirees and thousands of others in Mississippi are set to see increases to their Social Security benefits in this year. On average, officials said, Social Security retirement benefits will increase by about \$50 per month starting in January.

MISSOURI Jefferson City: Republican legislators are set to push for further expansion of charter schools around Missouri when the General Assembly reconvenes Jan. 8. Meanwhile, Democrats are pushing for more local control in counties where charters already operate, along with rolling back an expansion into Boone County that passed last year, Missouri Independent reported.

OHIO Columbus: A multi-year deal has been reached between Ohio State University's Wexner Medical Center and Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield members that will prevent any disruptions in care for some patients of the university's medical facilities.

OKLAHOMA Oklahoma City: The state of Oklahoma and the Oklahoma City Police Department violated federal laws, unnecessarily institutionalizing adults with behavioral health disabilities – or put them at serious risk – while Oklahoma City's police department engaged "in a pattern or practice of conduct that discriminates against people with behavioral health disabilities," a newly released report from the U.S. Department of Justice said.

OREGON Salem: A new state report has found evidence of a racial disparity in the number of traffic stops made by Oregon State Police and suggests Latino drivers may be more likely to be cited than white drivers by Salem police.

PENNSYLVANIA Wrightstown: A Wrightstown woman is facing more than 100 neglect and cruelty charges, including felonies, in what has been called the largest animal rescue case in Bucks County history.

RHODE ISLAND Providence: A group of students at Brown University is harnessing artificial intelligence to appeal medical claim denials, offloading a taxing task that leads to physician burnout.

SOUTH CAROLINA Greenville: An 18-year-old man was charged after police said he confessed to a recent shooting. According to the Greenville County Sheriff's Office, Ajiya Rashad Poole was charged with murder and possession of a weapon during a violent crime after he turned himself in and confessed to killing Zaire Jenkins, also 18.

SOUTH DAKOTA Pierre: A former state employee has pleaded guilty to two fraud-related charges, according to a news release from South Dakota Attorney's Office communications director Tony Mangan.

TENNESSEE Oneida: A recent study has found that a Tennessee national park ranks among the deadliest in the country. The study, conducted by John Foy & Associates, ranked the most deadly national parks to visit during the winter. Researchers analyzed mortality data provided by the U.S. National Park Service to determine the number of deaths that occurred in parks between Nov. 1 and Feb. 28 from 2007 to 2023. On that top 10 list is Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area, located in both Kentucky and Tennessee. The park has 4.24 deaths per 10 million visitors, according to the study, making it the ninth most deadly national park to visit in the winter.

TEXAS Dallas: More than 500 pet shop animals were killed in a fire that erupted at a shopping center in Northwest Dallas on Friday, officials said. Three individuals who were inside the building during the fire escaped safely without injuries.

UTAH Salt Lake City: Officials said an investigation is underway after a body was found in Jordan River waters last week, KUTV reported.

VERMONT Montpelier: According to new data, the state has the fourth highest rate of homelessness in the country, WCAX reported.

VIRGINIA Sutherland: Former Virginia State Police superintendent W. Gerald Massengill, a longtime Dinwiddie County resident who spent the final three years of his 36-year tenure at the helm of the Virginia State Police only to return to service several times in other capacities, died last week. He was 82.

WASHINGTON Bremerton: A gold coin worth \$2,500 was dropped in a Salvation Army red kettle this holiday season, offering a nice boost to the annual fundraiser conducted outside stores around Kitsap County. The 1908 Liberty coin was given at Fred Meyer in Bremerton.

WEST VIRGINIA Fairmont: Gov. Jim Justice awarded a \$2 million grant to Fairmont State University's aviation program, WV News reported.

WYOMING Cheyenne: The Wyoming Office of Outdoor Recreation is awarding more than \$20 million in grants for outdoor recreation projects across the state, Wyoming News Now reported.

From USA TODAY Network and wire reports

Notre Dame football transfers peaking

Mike Berardino

South Bend Tribune | USA TODAY NETWORK

NEW ORLEANS – On a shimmering Thursday night, in a venue that has seen more than its share of electric performances, Jayden Harrison may have delivered the most symbolic shot of adrenaline for surging Notre Dame football.

His 98-yard kickoff return for a touchdown to open the second half took 15 seconds from start to finish. Harrison, of course, can run that distance much faster if he takes the express lane, but why not savor the journey and admire some scenery along the way?

The seventh-seeded Irish (13-1), headed to the College Football Playoff

semifinals after this 23-10 dismantling of a proud Georgia mini-dynasty, certainly did some meandering in the early stages of this game and this season.

That's why they "keep the pain" of the Week 2 loss to Northern Illinois, as coach Marcus Freeman's mantra goes.

Harrison, likewise, had to make a pit stop or two in his college football career before arriving at Thursday's bittersweet cotillion. He spent a year in the SEC at Vanderbilt, close to his Antioch, Tennessee, home, before transferring to Marshall for the next three seasons.

Thursday, after bobbing and weaving through a phalanx of future NFL draftees, Harrison was asked why he had such faith in the Irish to pick them as his

third college stop last winter.

"It felt right," Harrison said. "I took my visit (to Notre Dame) when I was in the transfer portal. I got chills walking into the stadium, the same chills I got when I first came (with Marshall). It was the right place at the right time."

How were the chills Harrison felt in this Sugar Bowl? "Crazy," he said. "I got goose bumps still on my arms."

'When we needed it the most'

Jeremiah Love, held to 21 yards on seven touches, missed the final 18 minutes with an apparent right knee reinjury. That didn't keep Notre Dame's star running back from beaming when asked

about Harrison's long-awaited score.

"Me and J2, we've been talking about trying to take one to the house pretty much every week," Love said. "I've been telling him his time will come: 'It's going to open up, one of those returns.' It just happened to be this game when we needed it the most, too."

Kicker Mitch Jeter, the South Carolina grad transfer who is 5-for-6 on field goal attempts in the postseason, smiled at the mention of Harrison's heroics.

"That guy works so hard," Jeter said. "He is such a baller. I'm really excited for him to get that opportunity to make that play. He had a couple last year, I think,

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Ravens linebacker Kyle Van Noy and defensive tackle Travis Jones react after a play during the second quarter Saturday against the Browns at M&T Bank Stadium.

MITCH STRINGER/IMAGN IMAGES

Ravens clinch AFC North again

Baltimore will face familiar foe in playoffs

Chris Bumbaca

USA TODAY

For the second consecutive NFL season, the Baltimore Ravens are kings of the AFC North.

Baltimore defeated a burnt out and depleted Cleveland Browns team 35-10 on Saturday to earn the division crown and claim the AFC's No. 3 seed, guaranteeing them a home playoff game next weekend.

Going into Sunday's conclusion of the regular season, who the opponent will be remains undetermined and, after the Cincinnati Bengals' narrow win over the Pittsburgh Steelers later Saturday, depends on the Los Angeles Chargers

game against the Las Vegas Raiders. If the Chargers win Sunday, Pittsburgh and Baltimore would face off for a third time in an AFC North duel. Otherwise, "Harbaugh Bowl Part 4" would take place in the wild-card round in Baltimore.

The Ravens started three of their first four drives in Cleveland territory but managed seven points in what was an ugly first half for the offense. Quarterback Lamar Jackson, putting the finishing touches on his MVP candidacy, was inefficient through the air (16-for-32, 217 yards, two touchdowns) despite success on the ground (nine rushes for 63 yards).

The two-time MVP did surpass the

4,000-yard passing mark and finished the regular season with 915 rushing yards, his most since the 2020 season.

Jackson and tight end Mark Andrews connected for a TD for the sixth straight game.

The Browns started Bailey Zappe at quarterback, the fourth signal-caller the team used this season (Deshaun Watson, Jameis Winston and Dorian Thompson-Robinson).

Thompson-Robinson took over for a few series before Zappe came in for the remainder of the game.

No matter who was behind center, the Ravens defense feasted. Rookie cornerback Nate Wiggins opened the scoring with a pick-six, his first career interception.

Cleveland's defense, which battled

without several key contributors, bottled up Ravens running back Derrick Henry for the first half before "King Henry" – celebrating his 31st birthday Saturday – broke loose in the second half, with 130 of his 138 rushing yards coming after halftime in traditional Henry fashion. His 43-yard TD with 3:04 left iced the game.

The victory did not come without losses for the Ravens. Wide receiver Zay Flowers, who had an early third-down drop, missed most of the game with a knee injury. Safety Kyle Hamilton was banged up at the start of the second half but returned.

Cleveland scored its TD on a 16-yard completion from Zappe to tight end Jordan Akins with 11:33 to go in the game and cut the deficit to 11.

Olympian's arrest footage raises use of force issues

Tom Schad

USA TODAY

Video footage of Fred Kerley's arrest by Miami Beach police sparked a wide range of reaction on social media Friday – and renewed an all-too familiar conversation about policing in America.

Some watched the body-worn camera footage of the incident – and other video clips posted on social media by witnesses – and saw it as police did, with the Team USA sprinter and Olympic medalist as the aggressor who ignored orders from officers and started the physical confrontation.

Others saw Kerley as the victim, yet

another Black man on the receiving end of physical force from officers who they believe should have done more to de-escalate the situation.

Kerley, 29, was ultimately subdued by an officer's Taser and charged with battery upon a law enforcement officer, resisting an officer and disorderly conduct. The first charge is a third-degree felony, while the latter two are misdemeanors.

At a bond hearing Friday, one of Kerley's attorneys, Yale Sanford, called the situation a misunderstanding and "a complete overuse of any reasonable force by officers." And Miami television station WPLG reported that the judge,

Mindy Glazer, appeared to agree.

"Sergeant, this could have been handled a different way," Glazer told a Miami Beach police officer during the hearing, according to WPLG. "And I don't know if the officers in Miami Beach are busy handling a lot of complicated crime scenes there, but I have a gentleman who's never been arrested, there's no prior arrests, who his attorney's saying has competed in the Olympics, who is obviously a professional athlete and it's unfortunate that he got to this position."

Glazer indicated she had not seen the

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Fred Kerley won a bronze medal for the USA in the men's 100 during the Paris 2024 Olympic Summer Games at Stade de France. JAMES LANG/IMAGN IMAGES

TENNIS

Gauff, Fritz lead USA to United Cup

REUTERS

SYDNEY – A dominant United States lifted its second United Cup mixed team tennis tournament title in three years after beating Poland 2-0 on Sunday with Coco Gauff and Taylor Fritz both winning their singles matches.

The top seeds in the \$10 million tournament that began with 18 nations in contention clinched the trophy when Fritz defeated Hubert Hurkacz 6-4, 5-7, 7-6(4) after Coco Gauff outclassed Iga Swiatek 6-4 6-4 in Sydney.

The Americans had also won the 2023 title in the inaugural edition of the tournament.

The tournament serves as a tuneup

event for the Australian Open, the season's first Grand Slam.

With the second singles contest locked at one set apiece, Fritz raised his level at 3-3 in the tiebreak of the decider to see off Hurkacz and spark huge celebrations.

"Congratulations to Poland on a great week," said Fritz, addressing a dejected Polish side that finished runners-up at the tournament for a second successive year.

"They're an incredibly tough team and the margins were very small. I feel that it could have gone either way."

"I want to thank my team, unbelievable support. The vibes all week were amazing. That's one of the things that

makes our team so great and one of the reasons why we've been able to do so well."

"We've just really come together. It's amazing."

Gauff earlier stepped up preparations for the year's first major that begins next Sunday with a second successive win over world No. 2 Swiatek in a blockbuster showdown that gave fans at the Ken Rosewall Arena their money's worth.

The world number three, who beat Swiatek en route to the WTA Finals title last season, squandered a 2-0 lead in the first set but battled back from there to gain the upper hand in the match as Gauff's opponent counted the costs

of 19 unforced errors.

In another high-octane set that followed, Gauff recovered a break to level at 4-4 and went on to secure the win that ensured she ended her singles campaign at the tournament unbeaten.

"I have the belief that I'm one of the best players in the world. When I play good tennis, I'm hard to beat," said Gauff, who also beat Leylah Fernandez, Donna Vekic, Zhang Shuai and Karolina Muchova in the event.

"Today I think I played some great tennis. I'm glad I was able to get a point for Team USA. It was tough today, I'm not going to lie."

Reporting by Shrivaths Sridhar in Bengaluru, India

Bucs claim down-to-the-wire NFC South

Chris Bumbaca

USA TODAY

In typical NFC South fashion, the division title came down to the final moments of the regular season in the NFL.

And in the end, it was the Tampa Bay Buccaneers last standing.

The Buccaneers defeated the New Orleans Saints 27-19 Sunday despite a sluggish first half to win the division for the fourth consecutive season.

Tampa Bay trailed 16-6 at halftime but quarterback Baker Mayfield connected with receiver Jalen McMillan, who made a spectacular catch in the end zone with 10:09 to play for a go-ahead, 32-yard touchdown.

Rookie running back Bucky Irving provided some breathing room with an 11-yard touchdown rush on the first play out of the two-minute warning for the Bucs.

The Buccaneers capped the win off by getting Mike Evans a 9-yard gain to put him over 1,000 yards for the season, tying him with Hall of Famer Jerry Rice for the most consecutive 1,000-yard receiving seasons (11).

The Falcons needed a Buccaneers loss and to win their own contest against the Carolina Panthers, which went to overtime as the Tampa Bay game finished. With no path to the playoffs once the Buccaneers' result was finalized, the Falcons fell to the Panthers 44-38.

Atlanta, before making the change from Kirk Cousins to Michael Penix Jr. late in the season at quarterback, defeated the Buccaneers in a pair of one-score contests in October to hold the tie-breaker for the division title. That didn't end up mattering, however, as the Falcons faltered down the stretch, includ-



Buccaneers running back Bucky Irving (7) celebrates after scoring a TD against the Panthers in the second quarter Sunday. NATHAN RAY SEEBECK/IMAGN IMAGES

ing in a Week 17 overtime loss against the Washington Commanders that returned Tampa Bay to the top of the division standings.

Patriots fire Mayo, picked as Belichick's successor, after 1 year

After enjoying one of the longest periods of coaching stability under Bill Belichick, the New England Patriots are going the one-and-done route.

The Patriots on Sunday fired coach

Jerod Mayo after just one season, the team announced, marking a stunning about-face from owner Robert Kraft on the figure he appointed to be Belichick's successor.

Kraft said the decision to fire Mayo was "one of the hardest decisions I have ever made."

"Unfortunately, the trajectory of our team's performance throughout the season did not ascend as I had hoped," Kraft said in a statement.

New England stumbled to a 4-13 fin-

ish in Mayo's debut as a head coach, though the team won its season finale against the Buffalo Bills.

But after Belichick, who won six Super Bowls in 24 years leading the franchise, was pushed out after a 4-13 campaign, many expected Mayo would receive more time to engineer a turnaround. Instead, New England is once again looking for another fresh start.

Mayo's run began auspiciously with a surprising 16-10 win over the Cincinnati Bengals in the season opener. But the Patriots would lose their next six games and finish the year on a seven-game skid.

During the 40-7 loss to the Los Angeles Chargers in Week 17, "fire Mayo" chants broke out at Gillette Stadium.

Mayo also came under fire for calling New England "a soft football team across the board" following a 32-16 loss to the Jacksonville Jaguars in London in Week 7. The coach attempted to walk back his remark, but Belichick and others criticized him for his characterization of his players and their performance.

Despite the unrest around the mounting losses, Mayo said in the week prior to the regular-season finale against the Bills that he didn't have cause for concern regarding his standing.

"I'm always in constant communication with ownership," Mayo said in a news conference. "I feel like we're still on the same page."

The Patriots are projected to have more than \$130 million in salary cap space – more than any other team – for 2025 as well as the No. 4 overall pick in this year's NFL draft.

– Michael Middlehurst-Schwartz, USA TODAY

Footage

Continued from Page 1C

body-worn camera footage at the time of the hearing. Kerley was charged later Friday with domestic battery and robbery in an unrelated case in Miami-Dade County, stemming from what another one of his attorneys, Richard L. Cooper, called "a falsified accusation."

What sparked Fred Kerley's altercation with police?

According to police, the confrontation started when Kerley, the Olympic bronze medalist in the 100 meters, was attempting to enter an unrelated but active police scene en route to his car, which was apparently parked nearby.

While the beginning of body-worn camera footage released by police does not include audio, which is customary on modern body cams, the video appears to show Kerley approaching two officers and being directed to leave the area. He then approaches a third officer,

who puts his hand toward Kerley's chest in what is described in the written police report as an attempt to create space between them as a safety precaution. Kerley then moves the officer's hand away, and a scuffle ensues.

Video of the incident shows four officers attempting to wrestle Kerley to the ground, with one of them delivering several blows to the sprinter's rib cage in an apparent attempt to subdue him.

"Our officers reverted back to training," Miami Beach police spokesperson Christopher Bess told USA TODAY Sports on Friday. "Our officer was battered, and they responded to the resistance appropriately and professionally."

Bess said the officers' conduct will be subject to a review process, as is standard with any case involving the use of force.

Similarities between Kerley's altercation and Tyreek Hill's?

Kerley's arrest came a little less than five months after another high-profile athlete had a contentious incident with police in the Miami area.

In September, Miami Dolphins wide receiver Tyreek Hill was pulled over for speeding while driving to Hard Rock Stadium for a game. He was then forcefully pulled out of the car by Miami-Dade police officers and pinned to the ground after rolling up his window, despite being asked by officers not to do so. One of the officers involved in the incident, Danny Torres, was later placed on "administrative duties" following an internal review.

Hill later acknowledged that he had been speeding and could have handled the encounter differently, but he also criticized police for escalating the situation by removing him from his car.

Julius Collins, one of the attorneys representing Hill in that matter, told USA TODAY Sports that he sees similarities there in the footage of Kerley.

"The similarities between Mr. Hill and Mr. Kerley's unfortunate interactions with law enforcement is the obvious: The same treatment of African Americans at the hands of law enforcement and an escalation by law enforcement," Collins wrote in an email. "... Law enforcement officials have a duty to de-

escalate situations and yet again they failed to do so here."

Another member of Hill's legal team, civil rights lawyer Devon M. Jacob, reviewed the body-worn camera footage of Kerley's arrest and said the mechanics of the two incidents are significantly different.

Where Hill was sitting in his car and trying to understand the situation, Jacob said, Kerley appeared to make the initial contact with police and apparently ignored orders to leave the area.

"Citizens do not have a right to disobey lawful orders, such as to back up from a police scene that they're not involved with – which, in my understanding, is how this started," said Jacob, a Pennsylvania-based attorney who helped represent George Floyd's family in its civil case against the City of Minneapolis following Floyd's death at the hands of police in 2020.

"An individual has no right to get within the personal space, in a threatening manner, of a police officer. Once that happens, it's within an officer's right to take that person into custody. And that's what happened here."

Notre Dame

Continued from Page 1C

when he was at Marshall."

Jeter nailed that one, too, just like he connected from 44, 48 and 47 yards against the Bulldogs. The second of those, coming late in the opening half, started a dizzying stretch of 17 points in 54 seconds of game clock for the Irish.

Harrison's touchdown capped it, and, in between, three more transfers did their part to break this one open.

Defensive end RJ Oben, the Duke grad transfer who's been quiet for the bulk of this season, tomahawked Geor-

gia fill-in quarterback Gunner Stockton for a strip-sack 33 seconds before the break. That was Oben's first sack all season and just his seventh QB pressure.

"I came here for an opportunity and to play on big stages like this," Oben said, "and I'm happy I was able to capitalize on my opportunities. I'm just thankful for being here and being here with this team."

Third-year "viper" Junior Tuihala-maka (not a transfer) recovered at the Georgia 13, and six seconds later quarterback Riley Leonard – Duke transfer; maybe you've heard of him – found receiver Beaux Collins (Clemson transfer) for a 13-yard touchdown.

That gave Collins a chance to do his

end zone shuffle for the first time since Oct. 26 against Navy.

Return on transfer investment soars for Notre Dame football

More transfers would factor in the rest of the way.

Ex-Arizona State nickelback Jordan Clark (44 defensive snaps) broke up a third-and-3 route near midfield midway through the second quarter.

Later, it would be Northwestern transfer safety Rod Heard II's turn.

When Georgia reached the Irish 11 with about 10 minutes left and the issue still in doubt, Heard corralled Stockton on a third-down scramble and blanket-

ed tight end Lawson Luckie on a fourth-down fling that sailed beyond the end zone.

And we didn't even get to punt returner/special teams menace Max Huleman, formerly of Colgate.

Freeman likes to say his program will "minor" in the transfer portal, preferring the cost/benefit analysis of the research-and-development approach.

"When you first come in, you don't know how well you're going to fit in with the team or whether you'll be accepted by the guys," Oben said. "But to know that we all were able to come together and contribute to this team on such a big stage, this is the reason why we all came here."

Trade inquiries expected for Butler

Jeff Zillgitt

USA TODAY

A little more than a week after Miami Heat president Pat Riley declared the NBA team will not trade Jimmy Butler, the Heat said on Friday that "Jimmy Butler and his representative have indicated that they wish to be traded, therefore, we will listen to offers."

In the same news release, the Heat announced they have suspended Butler for seven games for "multiple instances of conduct detrimental to the team over the course of the season and particularly the last several weeks."

"Through his actions and statements, he has shown he no longer wants to be part of this team," the Heat added.

Can the Heat find a deal before the Feb. 6 trade deadline? Butler is under contract for 2025-26 at \$52.4 million for the season but has a player option to become a free agent this summer. If there is a trade, the Heat would like players and trade capital (read: first-round picks) in return.

Butler remains a productive two-way player even though he has a diminished role with the Heat this season. Butler averages 17.6 points on 55.2% shooting, and the Heat are better with Butler on the court than when he's not in the game, according to NBA.com on/off-court statistics.

Trading Butler's \$48.7 million contract for 2024-25 isn't easy, but unless a player has a no-trade clause, no contract is untradeable.

Here are five potential landing spots for Butler:

Golden State Warriors

Ranked No. 18 in offensive efficiency, the Warriors need help on that end, and Butler can provide that with his ability to score with efficiency and pass. His defense could make a strong defensive team (tied for No. 6) even better, depending on the trade.



Jimmy Butler dribbles with Warriors guard Stephen Curry in pursuit during a 2022 game. CARY EDMONDSON/IMAGN IMAGES

The Warriors, who would like to contend for another title with Steph Curry and Draymond Green, just acquired Dennis Schroder from Brooklyn and can trade him in a package with other players, starting Feb. 4.

Memphis Grizzlies

The Grizzlies are back among the top teams in the Western Conference – 23-13 and tied for second place with Houston and seven games behind Oklahoma City.

Memphis has a good thing going – it is the only team that ranks in the top five in offensive and defensive efficiency.

The Grizzlies need to be mindful of disrupting chemistry, but a player with Butler's playoff experience is valuable.

Dallas Mavericks

The Mavericks lost to Boston in last season's Finals and added Klay Thompson in the offseason. However, Dallas is 20-15 and a half game out of fourth place in the West. The Mavericks are 4-6 in their past 10 games and have lost four consecutive games.

Denver Nuggets

It's no secret the 20-14 Nuggets, who

won the title in 2023, want to improve the roster and reduce some of three-time MVP Nikola Jokic's offensive duties. Could Butler be the answer?

New York Knicks

How close are the Knicks to a title? They had a huge offseason, acquiring Karl-Anthony Towns and Mikal Bridges. They are 24-12, 2 1/2 games behind second-place Boston and seven games behind first-place Cleveland. But would Riley and the Heat trade Butler not only to another Eastern Conference team, but to the team Riley used to coach and left for the Heat three decades ago?



Clippers forward Kawhi Leonard made his season debut Saturday night against the Hawks. He scored 12 points in 19 minutes. KYOSHI MIO/IMAGN IMAGES

Clippers' Leonard makes season debut

James H. Williams

USA TODAY

LOS ANGELES – Kawhi Leonard made his season debut for the Los Angeles Clippers in Saturday evening's 131-105 victory over the Atlanta Hawks at the Intuit Dome.

Leonard gained confidence from the way his return went but knows he's still "day-to-day" when it comes to his availability due to ongoing right knee soreness.

"I'm just keeping it moving," Leonard said. "Just keep playing and doing what I have been doing to get me to this point, that's all I can ask for. It's out of my control."

Coach Tyronn Lue confirmed that the team will be intentional with Leonard's playing time in the coming days.

"Just making sure we are taking it slow," Lue said before the game about Leonard's availability. "This is like his preseason and his training camp because he didn't have that."

The six-time All-Star is expected to be on a minutes restriction as he continues to get acclaimed but Lue did not want to commit publicly to an exact number. Leonard is fully on board with the decision to work back into the game slowly.

Leonard missed the first 34 games of the season but the Clippers managed to produce a 19-15 record in his absence behind the efforts of James Harden and Norman Powell.

Leonard became a full-contact par-

icipant for Clippers practices starting Dec. 18, which fueled speculation that the two-time Defensive Player of the Year was close to making a return.

The San Diego State alum spent the past few days working with the team's G League affiliate in San Diego and participating in 5-on-5 scrimmages.

During the Clippers' media day session in September, Leonard consistently told reporters that he hoped to remain healthy enough to have a run in the playoffs.

He signed a three-year, \$153 million deal last January and felt he was coming off a "good" season in 2023-24.

The Clippers are currently the No. 7 seed in the Western Conference.

How did Kawhi Leonard perform?

Leonard scored 12 points and collected three rebounds in 19 minutes of play.

He brought the crowd to its feet during the first half after going 3-for-3 from long range. He finished 3-for-5 from 3, but 4-for-11 from the field overall.

He added an assist, a steal and had two turnovers.

He averaged 23.7 points, 6.1 rebounds and 3.6 assists in 68 games last season, the most he has played since playing a career-high 74 games during the 2016-17 season. Leonard was limited to 52 games throughout the 2022-23 season and missed the 2021-22 season due to an ACL injury.

Magic Johnson gives Biden assist at Medal of Freedom

Cydney Henderson

USA TODAY

Earvin "Magic" Johnson has a long list of accolades to his name across his Hall of Fame basketball career, including five NBA championships, three NBA Finals MVPs, three league MVPs and an Olympic gold medal.

Add a Presidential Medal of Freedom to the list.

President Biden awarded Johnson and 18 other recipients the nation's highest civilian honor on Saturday. "Thank you for all you've done to help this country," Biden said to the recipients during a ceremony at the White House.

When it came to dishing the medals, Biden needed an assist from Johnson, who just so happens to be a four-time NBA assists leader when he played for the Los Angeles Lakers. The 6-foot-9 Hall of Famer squatted down in front of Biden so the president could place the medal around his neck, a move that drew laughs from the crowd in the East Room.

Johnson flashed a thumbs-up sign, and the two embraced afterward.

Johnson was drafted out of Michigan State with the No. 1 overall pick in the 1979 NBA draft by the Lakers, where he ushered in the era of "Showtime" Lakers until he abruptly retired in 1991 after contracting HIV. "His honesty about his HIV status shattered stigmas and saved lives," the White House emcee announced on Saturday as Biden presented Johnson his medal. Johnson briefly played for the Lakers in 1996 before retiring for good.

He went on to become a successful entrepreneur and sports team owner. He's in the ownership groups for MLB's Los Angeles Dodgers, the WNBA's Los Angeles Sparks, the NFL's Washington Commanders, Los Angeles FC in MLS and the NWSL's Washington Spirit. His philanthropic work also supports underserved communities through his Magic Johnson Foundation.

Johnson, 65, said he was "so humbled and overwhelmed with emotion" to be recognized.

"Never in my wildest dreams would I have imagined that this kid from Lansing, MI would one day grow up and receive one of the highest civilian awards of the United States," Johnson, a 12-time All-Star, wrote on X. "To be in the company of so many remarkable individuals is both humbling and in-



President Joe Biden reacts while awarding former NBA player Earvin "Magic" Johnson the Presidential Medal of Freedom in the East Room of the White House on Saturday.

TOM BRENNER/GETTY IMAGES

spiring. I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to President Biden for his leadership and for recognizing the contributions of so many who are working to make a difference in our nation, especially inner cities of America, and across the world."

Johnson added: "This award is not just mine; it belongs to everyone who has helped me become the person and businessman I am today... It also belongs to everyone who has dedicated themselves to the causes of freedom, justice, and equality. I accept this honor with a deep sense of responsibility. It serves as a reminder of the work still ahead and the change we can all help bring about! I promise to keep working to make a positive difference for our country and the world."

Johnson was among 19 recipients awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by Biden, including Inter Miami soccer star Lionel Messi, former Secretary of State and first lady Hillary Clinton, U2 musician Bono, longtime Vogue editor-in-chief Anna Wintour and actors Denzel Washington and Michael J. Fox.

The Presidential Medal of Freedom is presented to "individuals who have made exemplary contributions to the prosperity, values, or security of the United States, world peace, or other significant societal, public or private endeavors," according to the White House.

Messi was unable to accept the Presidential Medal of Freedom from Biden on Saturday due to a scheduling issue.

Contributing: Safid Deen

COMMENTARY

Texas vs. Ohio State in flawed bracket

Cedric Golden

Austin (Texas) American-Statesman
USA TODAY NETWORK

The expanded College Football Playoff has played to mixed reviews after a flurry of blowouts in Round 1. It got even crazier as top seeds fell to the wayside in the quarterfinals.

So here we are, two games away from deciding who will play for the national championship, and those teams that received byes have said their goodbyes.

With a Cotton Bowl win over Ohio State, the Texas Longhorns can advance to the national championship game for the first time since the 2009 team lost to Alabama. The winner will get whoever comes out of the Orange Bowl matchup between Penn State and Notre Dame.

The playoff bracket kicked chalk predictors in the kneecaps as conference champions went 0-5, including top seeds Oregon, Georgia, Arizona State and Boise State. As a result, the CFP has become one polarizing topic, especially with undefeated top seed Oregon taking a 41-21 beatdown in Wednesday's Rose Bowl courtesy of the surging Buckeyes.

The Longhorns were the only quarterfinal winner that was pushed to the limit, but Quinn Ewers, Matthew Golden and Gunnar Helm got together for some overtime magic to keep the locker room at Moncrief-Neuhaus athletic center open for at least another week.

From first glance, awarding four first-round byes should go. If the NCAA wants to maximize attendance, then it can go with the NFL format and expand the field to 14 teams, award two first-round byes and play the first two rounds on college campuses. Also, have the selection committee seed the teams based on who it believes to be the best, regardless of conference titles, though the Power Four champions should still earn automatic invites.

It makes the most sense logically and will cut down on fans of the top seeds having to pay so much dinero during the holidays. Take Texas, for instance. I talked to some fans at the Atlanta airport who were lamenting the fact they had to juggle Christmas shopping with three potential trips to Atlanta within six weeks.



Texas coach Steve Sarkisian embraces defensive back Michael Taaffe as they celebrate their win in the Playoff's Peach Bowl. SARA DIGGINS/AMERICAN-STATESMAN

The announced attendance at the Peach Bowl was 71,105, but there were plenty of empty seats at Mercedes-Benz Stadium for Texas-Arizona State. DKR would have been packed well over 100,000 had they played in the 512.

The critics have been open about the bracketing process and the bye weeks awarded to the top four seeds, which allowed teams like Boise State and Arizona State a pass to the quarters. Both teams entered their games as double-digit underdogs, and while the Sun Devils nearly toppled a 14-point favorite, notable figures, such as Ole Miss coach Lane Kiffin, were outspoken in their criticism of the selection process.

While there is plenty of blue blood still flowing with Texas, Ohio State, Notre Dame and Penn State making the semifinals, the process is understandably under fire.

I asked Ohio State coach Ryan Day during Friday's Cotton Bowl conference

call if it was advantageous to play in Round 1 or if these recent results were a testament to the competitive nature of college football.

"We've talked here in this room about going back and watching some of the old NFL teams and winning that first wild-card game and then getting some momentum into the playoffs and continuing the play," he said. "There has been evidence of that throughout the NFL playoffs because there really has never been a college football playoffs like this before. So you go back on things that you can best compare to. And so, I did feel like if we could get a good win in the first game, we could build momentum. Now, it's our job to keep that momentum."

The fifth-seeded Horns are the lowest seed remaining, but coach Steve Sarkisian took it a step further, declaring Ohio State "the best team in college football" while calling Texas a massive

CFP semifinals

Orange Bowl

No. 6 seed Penn State vs. No. 7 Notre Dame, 7:30 p.m. ET Thursday

Cotton Bowl

No. 5 seed Texas vs. No. 8 Ohio State, 7:30 p.m. ET Friday

underdog in the first matchup of the two since Texas' 24-21 win in the 2009 Fiesta Bowl.

As for seeding the bracket, Sark falls on the side of the NCAA basketball tournament, which rewards automatic bids to conference champions before the selection committee reseeds the entire bracket – different than football giving the highest seeds to conference champions.

Texas and Ohio State didn't win their leagues, so they were required to play at home. A case can be made that they benefited from getting back out there as opposed to the four teams that received byes who all came out of the gate slow in the quarterfinals, each trailing by at least 10 points at the half.

Would you rather keep the momentum going or have a rest of nearly a month with a bye? Sarkisian said he doesn't know if playing in the first round was an advantage or a disadvantage.

"I know our guys were chomping at the bit to get back out there and play and compete, but I also know we're going into our 16th game here this coming week and without a real significant rest," he said. "We've been finding our spots to get some rest and to get healthy, but we didn't get that massive rest that I think a lot of the other teams do. Now, I don't know if that's beneficial or not. I think there is something to be said about playing football consistently in rhythm and routine and so on and so forth."

How they got here doesn't matter at this point because in the cases of four teams, the end justifies the means. The NCAA got it right by expanding the playoff, but it's far from perfect.

That said, we can all agree that it's been the most talked about season in years. And it's far from over.

Arrogant SEC doesn't rule college football



Dan Wolken
Columnist
USA TODAY

The time has come for the SEC's fans, its media machine and especially its commissioner to fess up to the reality that has simmered under the surface this entire college football season.

The world has changed significantly. And the old, reliable narrative that there's a different quality of football in the SEC than other leagues is now more myth than reality.

Isn't admitting a problem the first step toward salvation?

Let's tell it like it is – the SEC is a basketball league now.

OK, OK. That might have been a low blow. But Notre Dame 23, Georgia 10 is a quarterfinal result that should resonate for a long time to come – especially in the context of the SEC's miserable postseason.

A few weeks ago, you had some of the biggest names in the ESPN apparatus devoted to the idea that its most important college sports business partner, the SEC, got short shrift by the College Football Playoff selection committee because only three teams made the field.

Now, the league is down to one team – Texas, which wasn't even an SEC member 12 months ago – and was a desperate fourth-and-13 conversation from being completely shut out of the semifinals. And when you combine it with the SEC's 1-4 record in postseason games against the Big Ten, something has shifted. This is different.

A cynic might say that once it became legal to pay players, the SEC no longer had an advantage in, um, talent acquisition. But a more generous interpretation of the current climate doesn't even need to invoke tales of nefariousness. It's simply a fact that stockpiling talent is harder now, and recruits who might have been ticketed for the SEC in past years are organically landing at a wider group of programs.

By the way, that's not just an SEC vs. Big Ten or SEC vs. Big 12 phenomenon. It's an SEC vs. SEC phenomenon.

When Ole Miss gets a couple of guys



Georgia wide receiver Dillon Bell reacts after dropping a pass against Notre Dame in the Sugar Bowl on Thursday. AMBER SEARLS/IMAGN IMAGES

who might have gone to Alabama, and South Carolina lures a couple of guys who might have gone to Georgia, and Texas A&M snags a couple who might have gone to LSU, everyone moves more toward the middle.

This is not Urban Meyer's SEC. It's not Nick Saban's SEC. It's not even Kirby Smart's SEC anymore.

Back in December 2023, when it looked like the SEC might get shut out of the final four-team CFP, commissioner Greg Sankey appeared on ESPN's "College GameDay" and said: "That's not the real world of college football. Let's go back to Sesame Street, so we're really basic. One of these things is not like the other."

Well, which Sesame Street theme would describe the current state of affairs?

Count von Count might highlight the following simple math: In three CFP games, the SEC was outscored 96-66 and outgained 1,227-927. Just imagine if Texas hadn't found a way to pull that one out Wednesday against an Arizona State team that way too many SEC coaches believed to be inferior and unworthy of the Playoff because it didn't have to survive the SEC gauntlet.

Uh-huh. Sure.

See, the schadenfreude isn't really about rooting for Cinderella or taking down the big, bad bully. It's the utter arrogance of believing that you can continue getting the benefit of the doubt, year after year, in a sport that has changed as dramatically and as quickly as this one.

No one can dispute that the SEC's very best teams were pretty dominant

from 2006 through 2022, with a few notable but rare exceptions.

But let's go back to Sesame Street. Remember the song that goes, "These are the people in your neighborhood?"

Well, the SEC is a bad neighbor. It wrecks other conferences through expansion, it bullies its peers into submission with threats of doing something dramatically vague to pull away from college sports as we knew them, and it demands postseason structures in not just football but all the major sports to stack the deck in its favor.

Maybe a little humility – and perspective – is in order for Dear Leader Sankey.

Before Thursday, Notre Dame had been in BCS/CFP scenarios three times in the past 12 years. The scores of those games:

Alabama 42, Notre Dame 14

Clemson 30, Notre Dame 3

Alabama 31, Notre Dame 14

Although the SEC can't claim credit for Clemson, the point is that Notre Dame – a truly great, historic program – could not compete at this level. It was a physical mismatch every time.

That's no longer true.

The SEC hasn't physically mashed anyone of note this postseason, and the 2024 calendar year both began and ended with Alabama losing straight up to Michigan. Though the stakes this week weren't as high as last season's semifinals, the data points are piling up. You cannot honestly make the case anymore that even the SEC's best teams have some overwhelming physical edge. Even in its victory, Texas got pushed around pretty good.

Can the pendulum swing back? Of course. Coaches adjust, and programs that don't like their results make changes. At some point, the SEC will be back on top because that's what happens in a normal, healthy sport. Ebb and flows, true competition.

That's the way it should be – not the entitled, "we won all these championships under a completely different set of rules, so you must kneel to us now" ba

lonely that comes far too naturally to people all over that league.

It's time for a new act. It's time to be honest. It's time to face facts: You're just like everyone else now.

REVIEW

Jason Kelce's late-night show often felt contrived

Brandon Holbeck

The Delaware News Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Jason Kelce started the premiere episode of his ESPN late-night show with a question.

"How did we get here?"

It's hard to say.

Kelce's path to media stardom is well-chronicled: Converted linebacker improbably becomes an All-Pro center, delivers the greatest Super Bowl victory speech before the NFL's most rabid fan base, then starts the internet's biggest sports podcast with his superstar brother, who soon after starts publicly dating the world's biggest pop star.

But how did we get here to the 1 a.m. debut of "They Call It Late Night With Jason Kelce"? That's what's hard to describe as it's hard to say exactly what "They Call It Late Night" is trying to be.

Of course, many shows need time to find their footing, but the early returns for Kelce's – which is scheduled for a five-episode run through the NFL playoffs – weren't strong. The first 60-minute sample featured a mix of overwrought gags and stilted conversation. It sold the once-surprising elements of Kelce's public persona – think Mummer's costume and tailgate revelry – back to its audience in segments stripped of any thrill.

If you're of the mind that Kelce's omnipresence on NFL programming is becoming grating, the ESPN show did nothing to change your feelings.

It would be foolish to place all of the blame on Kelce. He's an above-average commentator when offering analysis on ESPN's "Monday Night Countdown," and his podcast hasn't lost steam even with the center removed from the inner workings of the Eagles locker room. A late-night sports talk show, a format that's failed numerous times (ESPN last tried it with Katie Nolan from 2018 to 2020), always seemed like a mysterious fit.

Who is ESPN expecting to watch a 1 a.m. show? Why latch on to an antiquated format?

At times, the show felt like a podcast devoid of chemistry. At other points,

you could see the outline of a made-for-YouTube clip. Both styles raised the question, why?

The show opened with a montage of Kelce in his Mummer's costume driving a golf cart shaped and styled like an Eagles helmet past Philadelphia's landmarks like Independence Hall, the Italian Market and the Art Museum. He stopped for snacks at the Sixth and Chestnut Wawa near Independence Hall before arriving at Union Transfer, the music venue where the show tapes on Friday afternoons.

In a monologue, Kelce introduced his wife, Kylie, as the show's Andy Richter-style sideline announcer. They professed their "(expletive)" love to each other and assured the audience there would be more curse words throughout the night. Don't worry, their kids are used to it, they said.

Kelce walked through the crowd and had a drink squirted into his mouth from a Gatorade bottle, a gag that was either a complete whiff or went unnoticed among the live crowd. He stepped into a "portal" that takes visitors directly to other talk-show hosts. In an act of Disney synergy, Kelce asked Jimmy Kimmel for advice. Kimmel summarily dismissed him in a bit lacking laugh lines.

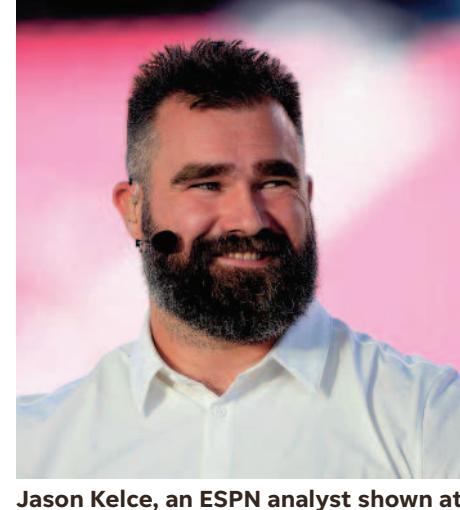
In the nadir of the show, a 14-year-old version of Kelce appeared on the stage. Kelce told him he would go on to win a Super Bowl as an offensive lineman. The kid was unimpressed.

"I forgot what a little unappreciative (expletive) I was," Kelce said.

A future version of Kelce then showed up. Kelce questioned why the actor was shorter than him. He replied that he had a shortening surgery. He then said that Kylie's shortening surgery had gone wrong and that he had baked her into a pie and eaten her.

After 17 minutes, a man in the back of the venue sporting the large orange gloves worn by on-field officials in charge of media timeouts waved off Kelce. It was one of the night's funnier gags. The show then returned to it before every commercial break, ensuring the audience would stop laughing.

In the second segment, guests



Jason Kelce, an ESPN analyst shown at a game in September, now is hosting a five-week late-night talk show on ESPN at 1 a.m. on Saturdays.

THEARON W. HENDERSON/GETTY IMAGES

straight, but Lil Dicky was tasked with reading a diversion into a fictitious relationship, and Barkley was directed to compliment the looks of Bengals quarterback Joe Burrow. Kelce added Jimmy Fallon levels of fake laughter.

The show's format didn't allow Kelce to get personal with any of the three guests, who all shared the stage for the duration of their appearances. It minimized Barkley, the focal point of the most successful studio show in recent memory, positioned Lil Dicky as an analyst instead of a comedian, and failed to display any of Baldinger's expertise.

Perhaps Kelce is miscast in this type of conversation, too. Who in the media is more qualified to discuss how the Eagles offensive line might feel about not chasing the record? On Saturday, Kelce had to take the pulse of a former NBA star and an actor before giving his own take.

The show ended with Kelce dressed in a tuxedo styled like his Mummer's costume introducing four guys who would compete in a beer-chugging competition: Rob Dunphy, the Philadelphia sports super fan with a Phillie Phanatic tattoo around his belly button; a Bills fan; a guy famous for chugging beer on TikTok; and a Bengals fan with six beer cans embedded in his beard.

After minutes of drawn-out intros, the single-beer chugging contest ended in under two seconds. The Bills guy poured a lot of his mug on his sweatshirt and the TikTok guy reigned supreme. Kelce then waved goodnight.

Kelce, who said he stayed up late to watch Conan O'Brien growing up, in the open gave the audience some insight into what he hopes the show will be.

"(We're) aiming for a real, casual vibe," Kelce said from the stage, which was fashioned as a man cave of sorts with a retro arcade game, dart board and refrigerator. "It's going to feel like we're just shooting the (expletive) in the living room and just talking ball."

Sign me up for that. Too few moments of Saturday's debut show felt real.

We all want to see inside the mind of Jason Kelce, not just the grizzly, hollering artifice.

PGA Tour discussing revamp of Tour Championship

Adam Schupak

Golfweek | USA TODAY NETWORK

KAPALUA, Hawaii – PGA Tour Commissioner Jay Monahan keeps insisting everything is on the table. Apparently, that includes the format of the Tour Championship.

The Athletic first reported on Friday that the tour is in "advanced discussions to revamp the Tour Championship format into a bracket-style event."

East Lake Golf Club in Atlanta has been the permanent home of the Tour Championship, the culminating event of the playoffs for the FedExCup, since 2005, and the tour is committed to keeping the event there but sources say it could rotate to other venues too. Golfweek has learned the changes could include medal match play.

Adam Scott, one of the PGA Tour's player directors, said he is wary of straying too far from a traditional format.

"I'm pretty much open-minded to explore anything but I'm unsure about that," he said of the medal match-play format that NBC/Golf Channel has some experience broadcasting at the St Andrews Links Collegiate. "It's hard to see where match play fits into pro golf. We play the whole season one way and then have the final week be head-to-head match play, I mean, we can have a look at it, but you'd have to kind of sell me on that just a little more."

Scott said winning the Tour Championship used to be a prestigious achievement in its own right but its stature has

been diminished as the FedExCup has become the primary prize. He envisions a scenario where both titles could carry significant prestige again.

"It's just my point of view that the Tour Championship has been a legacy-type event and that's kind of been lost in the FedExCup," Scott said. "It went from two tournaments, two trophies in that one week to now just one trophy. And I understand why, because it was getting confusing, but there seems to be a feeling like it'll be nice to kind of reestablish the Tour Championship as that kind of legacy-type event."

The FedExCup playoff structure has been tweaked several times since its inception in 2007. Scottie Scheffler, the reigning FedExCup champion, took a shot at the current model in August ahead of the Tour Championship, calling it "silly."

"You can't call it a season-long race and have it come down to one tournament," Scheffler said. "Hypothetically we get to East Lake and my neck flares up and it doesn't heal the way it did at The Players, I finish 30th in the FedExCup because I had to withdraw from the last tournament? Is that really the season-long race? No. It is what it is."

Scott and two of his fellow player directors on the PGA Tour board – Patrick Cantlay and Peter Malnati – as well as tour veterans Keegan Bradley and Collin Morikawa said they would be in favor of a change to the starting-stroke model, the current format in use since 2019, which handicaps the field and gave

Scheffler a start at 10 under, two strokes better than his closest competitor and as many as 10 strokes ahead of the 30th-ranked player.

"I'm not a big fan of the staggered start. If there's a change, I'd like to see that change," Cantlay said.

"The format now I think is a little clunky. I think it's a little strange," Bradley said. "There's no right or wrong way. They're trying to create drama in the last event of the year, and you got guys like Scottie Scheffler who, you know, if they don't do something like that, wouldn't have to even play that week and you win the FedExCup. So I'm not in a position, thankfully, to make those (decisions), but I'm all for trying to make the Tour better."

Added Malnati: "I'm hopeful that we can do away with the starting strokes thing because I hate that that's part of the conversation every year. I think it's important that we maintain a season-long element to it. If you played a Scottie Scheffler season, you shouldn't get to the Tour Championship and start even with everyone else. I think there's different ways that it could go but I don't know what direction it's going to go."

The tour's TV partners – CBS and NBC – are driving the discussion. When asked if there is specific data driving the change, Malnati said, "I think there's data that says the numbers aren't good in terms of viewership of the Tour Championship." NBC, which broadcast the event in 2024, reportedly was displeased with the ratings for what is sup-

posed to be one of the premier events. (NBC will broadcast the three playoff events this season.)

Scott guessed that a decision for the Tour Championship, which is scheduled for Aug. 21-24 before college and pro football takes center stage, would have to be made in the next eight weeks.

"If it's a prestigious event, it should be treated with care," Scott said.

But Malnati conceded that may be easier said than done. "We want there to be a focus on who won the Tour Championship, not just who won the FedExCup. With FedEx as our biggest sponsor, that's why it's so complicated. How do you make it all about FedEx but still having a legitimate tournament that you call your Tour Championship?"

There is growing support among some players that the Tour Championship should be a 72-hole stroke-play tournament held Wednesday through Saturday for triple the FedExCup points, which would declare a winner of the Tour Championship, with the top eight advancing to a stroke-play shootout for the FedExCup title.

"I like it. I do," Scott said of the concept. "I think if you put a lot on the line on Sunday, it's interesting."

Malnati echoed that sentiment. "That would be great entertainment," he said. "You can still have a legitimate tournament and yet you'd still have the potential gripe that the best player of the year doesn't win the FedExCup but the 18-0 (New England) Patriots didn't win the Super Bowl either."

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Atlantic Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Boston	26	9	.743	—
NY Knicks	24	12	.667	2½
Philadelphia	14	19	.424	11
Brooklyn	13	22	.371	13
Toronto	8	27	.229	18

Southeast Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Orlando	21	15	.583	—
Miami	17	16	.515	2½
Atlanta	18	18	.500	3
Charlotte	7	26	.212	12½
Washington	6	26	.188	13

Central Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Cleveland	30	4	.882	—
Milwaukee	17	16	.515	12½
Indiana	18	18	.500	13
Detroit	17	18	.486	13½
Chicago	16	19	.457	14½

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Southwest Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Houston	22	12	.647	—
Memphis	23	13	.639	—
Dallas	20	15	.571	2½
San Antonio	18	17	.514	4½
New Orleans	6	29	.171	16½

Northwest Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Oklahoma City	29	5	.853	—
Denver	20	14	.588	9
Minnesota	17	17	.500	12
Portland	12	22	.353	17
Utah	8	25	.242	20½

Pacific Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
L.A. Lakers	20	14	.588	—
L.A. Clippers	20	15	.571	½
Golden State	18	16	.529	2½
Sacramento	16	19	.457	4½
Phoenix	15	18	.455	4½

Friday's Scores

Detroit 98, Charlotte 94
Orlando 106, Toronto 97
Boston 109, Houston 86
New Orleans 132, Washington 120
Oklahoma City 117, NY Knicks 107
Cleveland 134, Dallas 122
San Antonio 13, Denver 110
Sacramento 138, Memphis 133
L.A. Lakers 119, Atlanta 102

Saturday's Scores

Philadelphia 123, Brooklyn 94
Detroit 119, Minnesota 105

Indiana 126, Phoenix 108

Chicago 139, N.Y. Knicks 126

Denver 122, San Antonio 111

Utah 136, Miami 100

Portland 105, Milwaukee 102

Golden State 121, Memphis 113

L.A. Clippers 131, Atlanta 105

Sunday's Games

Boston at Oklahoma City

New Orleans at Washington

Charlotte at Cleveland

Utah at Orlando

L.A. Lakers at Houston

Sacramento at Golden State

Monday's Games

Portland at Detroit, 7 p.m.

Phoenix at Philadelphia, 7 p.m.

Indiana at Brooklyn, 7:30 p.m.

Milwaukee at Toronto, 7:30 p.m.

Orlando at N.Y. Knicks, 7:30 p.m.

San Antonio at Chicago, 8 p.m.

Dallas at Memphis, 8 p.m.

L.A. Clippers at Minnesota, 8 p.m.

Miami at Sacramento, 10 p.m.

Tuesday's Games

Phoenix at Charlotte, 7 p.m.

Houston at Washington, 7 p.m.

L.A. Lakers at Dallas, 7:30 p.m.

Minnesota at New Orleans, 8 p.m.

Atlanta at Utah, 9 p.m.

Boston at Denver, 10 p.m.

Miami at Golden State, 10 p.m.

Wednesday's Games

Oklahoma City at Cleveland, 7 p.m.

Chicago at Indiana, 7 p.m.

Washington at Philadelphia, 7 p.m.

Detroit at Brooklyn, 7:30 p.m.

Toronto at N.Y. Knicks, 7:30 p.m.

Portland at New Orleans, 8 p.m.

L.A. Clippers at Denver, 9 p.m.

San Antonio at Milwaukee, 9:30 p.m.

Thursday's Games

Toronto at Cleveland, 7 p.m.

Golden State at Detroit, 7 p.m.

Minnesota at Orlando, 7 p.m.

Atlanta at Sacramento, 7 p.m.

Phoenix at Denver, 7:30 p.m.

Philadelphia at Milwaukee, 8 p.m.

San Antonio at Milwaukee, 9:30 p.m.

Portland at Cleveland, 7 p.m.

Golden State at Detroit, 7 p.m.

Minnesota at Orlando, 7 p.m.

Houston at Memphis, 8 p.m.
Portland at Dallas, 8:30 p.m.
Miami at Utah, 9 p.m.
Atlanta at Phoenix, 9 p.m.
Charlotte at L.A. Lakers, 10:30 p.m.

NFL

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South

North

Central

Division

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New Orleans again shows its toughness



Mike Freeman
Columnist
USA TODAY

The scenes from New Orleans just one day after an attack that killed 14 people and wounded dozens of others were encouraging.

Bourbon Street was closed on New Year's Day as law enforcement investigated the attack, but it reopened Thursday afternoon. There was the usual bustle of tourists. The Sugar Bowl played on. Life in the city seemed to quickly return to normal.

That normality, and the speed with which it arrived, isn't surprising. This is New Orleans, after all. Few American cities have recently endured tragedy like this one while, simultaneously, and seemingly always, finding a way to rise above it.

This is a city I've been to dozens of times. Have family and friends there. Was there after Hurricane Katrina in 2005. The storm killed thousands of people and caused property damage estimated at hundreds of billions of dollars. Its impact can still be felt today and might be forever. But New Orleans still stands tall.

New Orleans, again, is giving the country a lesson on how to get back up. It always has. It always does.

"This city is amazing. This city is known for its resiliency," said Anne Kirkpatrick, the city's police superintendent, at a news conference on Thursday. "This is a city that is still impacted from 20 years ago with Hurricane Katrina. This city knows pain. But this city also knows how to recover."

No, New Orleans isn't perfect. Like other cities, especially in the South, it has an extensive history of slavery, segregation and anti-Blackness. But from those tragedies, centuries of them, arose Black political leaders and power.

Even the city's NFL team has seen stunning lows and come back to re-



Police officers sit on horses near the site where people were killed by a man driving a truck in an attack during New Year's celebrations in New Orleans on Jan. 1. EDUARDO MUÑOZ/REUTERS

markable highs. The Saints were one of the original joke franchises, fans perfecting bag-over-head.

Then quarterback Drew Brees came to town. He would become a leader off the field as well in the aftermath of Katrina.

"When I was first drafted by the Saints, I am not going to lie, I was pretty scared," former Saints running back Reggie Bush once said. "I was nervous. I didn't know what to expect. It was a year after Hurricane Katrina, and they didn't even know if they were going to have a home field to play on. I didn't know what to expect.

"Drew Brees called me the night I was

drafted and told me he was excited to play with me. He told me how he got to play with LaDainian Tomlinson and he was looking forward to playing with me. That changed my entire view on what I was going into. It also eased my mind. I had a chance to watch Drew play when he was with the Chargers, so for a guy like Drew to call me says a lot about him. It eased my emotions about what I was getting into."

Will the city be ready for Super Bowl 59 next month?

Well, a better question might be, why would you ever bet against this city?

"We here in New Orleans have proven time in and time out that we can provide

safe environments," said Kirkpatrick. "Look at (the) Taylor Swift (concert) that was just a few weeks ago – incredible environment of fun, incredible environment where they can come and know they're safe. We have plans.

"This is a terrorist. The terrorist is going to be hell-bent no matter what, to create carnage and to destroy, but we as a city and as a law enforcement community have already proven over time that we can handle and manage these large crowds."

We've seen this New Orleans story before. The city is expert at the comeback.

It's happening again.

REMEMBRANCE

Golf writer Steve DiMeglio was one of a kind

Roxanna Scott

USA TODAY

The son of a history professor, Steve DiMeglio had encyclopedic knowledge of the game of golf. If you ever had the chance to follow him around a PGA Tour event like I did, you'd see he couldn't walk two steps without running into a friend – players, their caddies and other reporters – and telling a joke with a fist bump and "Hey, big man" as his usual greeting.

He was teased by friends for his diminutive stature, and he'd give it right back with his quick wit and fun-loving nature.

He was opinionated but fair in his scrutiny. He was generous with friends but could also be frugal. I knew he'd catch rides at tournaments with fellow reporters to save money on a rental.

He was funny and always supportive of outsiders like me, who entered the inner sanctum of golf and got to see the game through his eyes when I was his editor at USA TODAY and later at Golfweek.

DiMeglio died this week at the age of 63 after battling cancer, a journey he documented regularly with posts on social media. His passing touched the biggest names in golf, with Tiger Woods writing, "Unfortunately the golf world lost part of our family today, beloved golf writer Steve DiMeglio. I was always very close to Steve and we texted and talked about how he needed to keep fighting to get better so we could see each other in the Bahamas last month. And we did. I am so grateful for that. This is a very sad day for all of golf. We truly lost a friend."

'He was quick to laugh about everything, including himself'

Most of us who worked closely with Steve knew one of his super powers was his ability to build relationships.

"He was incredibly well connected. I think without trying to curry favor, he had favor with the golfers," said Reid Cherner, a former sports editor at USA TODAY. "He was pretty even-handed, he wasn't light-handed. He criticized when it was needed, but I think he was always in bounds. I don't think anybody ever thought he went out of bounds with that criticism. He was so tuned in and knew so much that when you were his editor, you just didn't have a whole lot you



Rory McIlroy, center left, talks to USA TODAY golf writer Steve DiMeglio, center right, at the 2016 U.S. Open at Oakmont Country Club. MICHAEL MADRID/IMAGN IMAGES

needed to guide Steve on. He just did it."

All of his editors can tell stories about the push-and-pull we'd occasionally have with Steve. Rachel Shuster edited Cover stories at USA TODAY and remembers calling him for occasional assignments.

"First, he'd say, 'Really? You really need this now?' It was a game we played," Shuster said. "I would ask for something, he would bitch and moan and say, 'Well, I'll see what I can do.'

"In no time at all, he'd come back with a full story and everything we wanted. I sort of looked forward to those because I knew what was coming, but I also knew he'd get what we needed."

Joe Fleming was DiMeglio's longtime golf editor at USA TODAY. They met more than three decades ago when both worked at The Desert Sun in Palm Springs, California.

"He really knew golf, he knew about equipment, he knew about the history, he knew what the players did well and what they weren't so good at, he knew all that stuff," Fleming said. "He watched a lot of (golf), and he was a really good player, too. He couldn't hit the fades and the draws as well as the pros, but he knew how to do it. He knew how hard it was."

DiMeglio was a politics writer covering Capitol Hill before he started at USA TODAY, first on the baseball beat before he switched to golf full time. Lee Ivory, the former publisher and executive editor at Sports Weekly, hired him to cover baseball.

"I thought he was obviously a solid journalist and had a passion for the craft," Ivory said, when asked about what he saw in DiMeglio. "All of the attributes that you look for in a solid reporter: honest, forthright, passionate and a truth teller. He also brought with it a great personality; he was quick to laugh about everything, including himself."

Without a doubt, his ability to joke and tease endeared him to his colleagues. USA TODAY columnist Christine Brennan recalls the back-and-forth banter they'd share when covering tournaments together, even though they'd have friendly disagreements at times.

She remembers DiMeglio walking through the press room while covering the Masters, where they sat side-by-side for years. "It was made for Steve DiMeglio. He walked those rows, someone would tease him, someone would stop him to ask a question," Brennan said. "He couldn't make it to the aisle because he had so many friends and colleagues that wanted to talk to him."

"He was a golf writer, but he could really run for office on the PGA Tour. He knew everyone, and he just loved the banter, the fun, the teasing. And of course, they just loved him."

The Masters food, a stash of Diet Pepsi

Augusta National was a place DiMeglio loved, and it's not hard to see why. The history, the traditions, the beauty of

the course leave every reporter in awe as they drive through the gates.

And the food. DiMeglio loved the food. USA TODAY columnist Nancy Aron recalls.

"Some people bring home golf shirts or flags from the Masters. DiMeglio brought home caramel corn," she wrote.

"In addition to pimento cheese sandwiches and peach ice cream sandwiches, the Masters has a caramel-peach popcorn that's delicious. Think Cracker Jack times a million. DiMeglio loved the stuff."

"Any time he'd make a trip to the media dining area, he'd come back with a bag or two of it. By the end of the day, his backpack would be filled with bags of caramel corn and a sandwich or two. The sandwiches he'd eat at night, back at the house the USAT staff rented, chasing them with a Diet Pepsi and a cigarette. But the caramel corn he took home and stashed in his freezer. He once told me, very proudly, that he had enough to last him until mid-summer."

Scott Zucker, who edited DiMeglio's baseball stories at Sports Weekly, said DiMeglio was known for his generosity and wouldn't hesitate to give you the shirt off his back. (He often gave his buddies golf shirts or other freebies he'd get in the mail.) "He was a funny combination of super cheap and also very generous at the same time," Zucker said with a laugh.

Cherner remembers a trip to Las Vegas the two had when DiMeglio opened up his suitcase.

"He had very little clothes. It was filled with cigarettes and Diet Pepsi," Cherner said. "I would say to Steve, you know you can buy both here in Las Vegas."

"That was another thing about Steve, he was a funny guy, and he had a great sense of humor about himself."

I was lucky to share quite a few laughs with Steve myself, but also some hard times as he lost both parents in recent years. I got to see a side of him that was patient, nurturing and kind. He was my guide inside the golf world in 2018 and he boosted me when I questioned myself or wondered if I belonged.

I texted him from a golf event in 2019, feeling like a fish out of water.

"You are NEVER out of place. Have fun," he texted back.

We will all miss you, big man. But know that we'll never forget your love of the game and all the stories you gave us.

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82ND ANNUAL GOLDEN GLOBE AWARDS

MARGARET QUALLEY, LEFT, AND DEMI MOORE
BY VALERIE MACON/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

REPLAY THE BIG NIGHT

Join USA TODAY for complete coverage of the Golden Globes, including winners, viral moments and backstage interviews.

- How did Nikki Glaser fare as host?
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LIFELINE



IT'S YOUR BIRTHDAY WHO'S CELEBRATING TODAY

Eddie Redmayne is 43. Kate McKinnon is 41. Julie Chen Moonves is 55.

HOROSCOPE | SANCTUARY

More: www.sanctuaryworld.co

Aries (March 21-April 19). Familiar gripes? Mars' entrance to Cancer rekindles emotional disputes you thought you had resolved last October!

Taurus (April 20-May 20). Didn't you already HAVE this conversation? Mars' entrance to moody Cancer revives an emotional dialogue from last October.

Gemini (May 21-June 21). Need to turn your financial situation around? Do so by getting clear on your priorities!

Cancer (June 22-July 22). Back at square one? Avoid blowing this situation out of proportion! It's a new year after all! Have patience!

Leo (July 23-Aug. 22). Feeling drained? Trust your body. Don't attempt to push through exhaustion!

Virgo (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). Struggling to get organized? You're herding cats! Strive to rally others around a common goal.

Libra (Sept. 23-Oct. 23). Picking the right battles? A conflict with an authority figure that sparked last October reignites!

Scorpio (Oct. 24-Nov. 21). Rethinking a long-term goal? You knew success would take time to manifest but progress THIS slow seems ridiculous!

Sagittarius (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). Fighting over who owns what? A money dispute quelled last October once again rears its head!

Capricorn (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). Can't live with them, can't live without them? This adage hits too close to home as Mars re-enters Cancer.

Aquarius (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). Ready to be DONE with this task? Unfortunately, you have further to go as Mars re-enters Cancer. Pace yourself.

Pisces (Feb. 19-March 20). Regretting a hasty romantic gamble? Mars' entrance to Cancer sees you returning to the scene of the crime!

'Ends With Us' dispute plants 'astroturfing' in popular slang

Filings in the case of Blake Lively and Justin Baldoni shed light on celeb culture. [Page 2D](#)

MOVIES



Ryan Destiny as boxer Claressa Shields in "The Fire Inside."

PROVIDED BY SABRINA LANTOS/AMAZON CONTENT SERVICES

'Fire Inside' sparks actor and subject

Julie Hinds Detroit Free Press | USA TODAY NETWORK

DETROIT — When a new movie arrives about Flint, Michigan, it's usually yet another documentary on the water crisis that has defined the city in the public eye for the past decade. • But that's not the case with "The Fire Inside," a film that may put Flint on the map for beating the odds. • The gritty, compelling biopic tells the story of Claressa Shields, the two-time Olympic boxing champion who has gone on to win all 15 of her matches as a professional. • Shields says it's "about triumph, victory" and "shows the resilience of the people of Flint." • "That's how I got to where I am," she says.

Shields is 29, but to her hometown, she remains the girl with an unlikely dream who worked and worked until she made it a reality.

"They still see me as that 11-year-old kid that was walking around ... asking for donations to make it to these big tournaments," she says. "Some people gave one hundred (dollars), some people gave a dollar, some gave 10 cents, some gave prayer. But all of it helped me get to where I am. I always want to pay homage to that."

On this morning, Shields is sitting on a hotel couch with Ryan Destiny, the rising Detroit actress who portrays her in the film, and Rachel

Morrison, the Oscar-nominated cinematographer of "Fruitvale Station" and "Black Panther," who makes her directing debut with "The Fire Inside."

The three women express their mutual admiration during a conversation about the drama, with Shields providing much of the candor and humor. She says she initially was disappointed to find out the film would open on Christmas Day, not realizing that Dec. 25 is a popular release date for movies considered awards contenders.

"Somebody was like, 'Claressa,

See SHIELDS, Page 2D



Boxer Claressa Shields, of Flint, Mich., throws a punch at women's WBC champion Vanessa Lepage-Joanisse during the main event at the Little Caesars Arena in Detroit on July 27, 2024.

DAVID RODRIGUEZ MUÑOZ/USA TODAY NETWORK

MOVIES

No longer 'Unknown,' Barbaro channels Baez

Marco della Cava
USA TODAY

Talk about casting whiplash. Is there a bigger one than going from playing a pilot in the U.S. Navy's Top Gun program to portraying the nation's foremost folk singer and civil rights champion?

For actress Monica Barbaro, those disparate performances — staring down Tom Cruise as Phoenix in 2022's "Top Gun: Maverick" and dueting as Joan Baez with Timothée Chalamet in the new Bob Dylan biopic "A Complete Unknown" (in theaters now) — promise to summon stardom.

"It's a bit overwhelming," says Barbaro, 35, flashing a big smile. "I'm looking forward to coming home for the holidays."

Barbaro grew up in a small town just north of San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge, standing out in her public-school drama performances before heading off to study acting and dance at New York University. She quickly found steady work, landing roles in NBC's legal drama "Chicago Justice" and opposite Josh Groban and Tony Danza in the Netflix comedy series "The Good Cop."

Then came Cruise followed by Chalamet, and the challenge of a lifetime: singing and playing guitar in the style of an iconic performer in American music history.

Joan Baez, feisty and spirited at 83, was a huge folk star when she met Bob Dylan on the New York music scene in the early 1960s. She had been on the cover of Time magazine; he was new to the Big Apple.



Joan Baez (Monica Barbaro) and Bob Dylan (Timothée Chalamet) have chemistry on and off stage in "A Complete Unknown."

PROVIDED BY SEARCHLIGHT PICTURES

Both were smitten and formed a close personal bond that lasted several years, until Dylan's soaring celebrity derailed their relationship around 1965. "Dylan broke my heart," Baez said in "I Am a Noise," a 2023 documentary about her life. "I was just stoned on that talent."

It took years, but eventually she put that seminal public pairing in perspective. The watershed moment came when she looked at a painting she was doing of the singer as a young man, "and he was that young face with baby fat, we both had baby fat then, and I put on his music and I started to cry," she told USA TODAY. "All that resentment completely washed away."

Barbaro reached out to Baez as she was preparing for the film. Their conversation was revelatory for many reasons, she says, including shedding light on the nature of their split, which is dramatized in "A Complete Unknown."

"She told me there was a lot of love there, and a lot of disappointment," Barbaro says. "Not just in his walking away from her, but also she just wanted to say something with her music and change the world and speak out about things. At first, he was that protest voice also, and then he didn't want to do that anymore. She was also in love with his potential. But she did say that she so appreciates what he did do with his talent."

Barbaro took on the role with no formal voice or guitar skills

Barbaro had never spent much time singing before, which sounds terrifying — as if an actor who has never swum being asked to play Michael Phelps. So she spent a full year with a

See BARBARO, Page 2D

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

'Ends' filing plants 'astroturfing' in lexicon

David Oliver

USA TODAY

When "It Ends With Us" was released, the press tour was, well, a mess. That disaster and the surrounding back-and-forth that played out in the media is at the center of a legal complaint filed by the film's star, Blake Lively, who says she was the subject of a smear campaign at the time of the movie's release.

Lively has accused her "It Ends With Us" co-star and director Justin Baldoni of sexual harassment and a retaliatory smear campaign to cover it.

Lively's lawyers claim Baldoni tried to "destroy" the "Gossip Girl" alum's career and privately conceal abuse of his own.

It's part of a practice called "astroturfing," the suit says, and it has left fans and news readers alike questioning who is pulling the strings when it comes to their opinions of Hollywood.

Baldoni hired crisis PR executive Melissa Nathan and her company The Agency Group to protect himself from Lively's possible claims becoming public and worked with publicist Jennifer Abel, who is named in the complaint.

"This Blake Lively situation has made me terrified of how easy it is to be manipulated," one person commented on X after details of the suit emerged. "It's crazy how we can be manipulated so easily like you don't know what to believe anymore," another said.

It's not the first time the internet has sided collectively against a certain star, and it speaks to the ravenous effects of social media and "stan" culture.

"It's important to not hold celebrities to impossible standards because these are fallible humans with inevitable flaws and shortcomings, just like the rest of us," Shana Redmond, who is a professor of English and comparative literature at Columbia University, told USA TODAY.

"What we see on social media is a small slice of who they are – we can't substitute that glamour for the whole."

What is astroturfing?

"Astroturfing" was described in the filing as "the practice of publishing opinions or comments on the internet, in the media, etc. that appear to come from ordinary members of the public but actually come from a particular company or political group."

The complaint includes several alleged instances in which Baldoni's teams tried to plant stories to "shift" the narrative in support of the actor. According to the filing, Abel and Nathan had a text exchange when Daily Mail published a story with the headline "Is Blake Lively set to be CANCELLED? String of 'hard to watch' videos that have surfaced following 'tone deaf' Q&A to promote 'It Ends With Us.'"

"You really outdid yourself," Abel said. Nathan responded: "That's why you hired me right? I'm the best."

The complaint also accuses of Abel colluding with Melissa Nathan's sister, Sara Nathan, an editor-at-large at the New York Post, to plant negative stories, including one in the Post-owned tabloid Page Six with the headline "Blake Lively approved final cut of 'It Ends With Us' amid feud with co-star director Justin Baldoni."

The filing claims Abel wrote, "He wants to feel like she can be buried," to which Melissa Nathan replied: "You know we can bury anyone."

In another instance in the filing, Baldoni texts Abel a social media post and thread that accused Hailey Bieber of bullying behavior and wrote: "This is what we would need."

How common is the weaponization of fans?

The claims in Lively's suit left fans question whether they had been manipulated before. In instances when the internet sided with one celeb over another, fans wondered, were their opinions of the controversies really their own?

For some, the moment is reminiscent



Blake Lively has accused her "It Ends With Us" co-star Justin Baldoni of sexual harassment and a retaliatory smear campaign to cover it.

ETIENNE LAURENT/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

of the legal battle between Johnny Depp and Amber Heard, in which he won his defamation lawsuit and she partially won her counterclaim. Heard alleged abuse, so did Depp, and social media users on TikTok tried to make sense of it.

She told NBC News last month in reaction to Lively's case: "Social media is the absolute personification of the classic saying 'A lie travels halfway around the world before truth can get its boots on.' I saw this firsthand and up close. It's as horrifying as it is destructive."

The viral nature of social media means platforms can elevate questionable content. It also can breed unhealthy levels of fandom.

"Stan culture" has a different intensity when a celebrity can be virtually accessed any time of day, any day of the year," Redmond says.

Baldoni's past complicates allegations

Baldoni has long been considered one of Hollywood's most vocal leading men when it comes to decrying violence

against women and the pervasive forms of masculinity that plagued the entertainment industry at the height of the #MeToo movement nearly a decade ago.

He co-hosts the "Man Enough" podcast with Liz Plank, which says it is "a safe environment for a range of perspectives" to candidly discuss masculinity. His Instagram bio includes a note about domestic violence prevention.

"When (figures) show themselves to be something other than what you imagine, disappointment is expected," Redmond says. "And it can happen often as we're constantly inundated with new media meant to hook us and make us fall for someone."

What Lively, Baldoni say now

Lively claims that Baldoni engaged in predatory behavior, which was sexual in nature, writing in the complaint that she and other "It Ends With Us" cast and crew members "experienced invasive unwelcome, unprofessional and sexually inappropriate behavior."

In a statement provided to The New York Times, Freedman called Lively's allegations "completely false, outrageous and intentionally salacious with an intent to publicly hurt and rehash a narrative in the media." He said that Baldoni's production company Wayfarer Studios "only responded to incoming media inquiries to ensure balanced and factual reporting and monitored social activity."

As this development plays out, Lively has the support of one influencer figure, whose opinion likely means a lot to the biggest fans of the film: Colleen Hoover, the author behind "It Ends With Us."

In a message posted to her Instagram Story, the author wrote: "@blakelively, you have been nothing but honest, kind, supportive and patient since the day we met. Thank you for being exactly the human that you are. Never change. Never will."

Contributing: Jay Stahl, Edward Segarra and Pamela Avila

Shields

Continued from Page 1D

the best movies come out on Christmas Day.' And I'm like, 'Oh, (expletive), you're right!' she says as Destiny and Morrison join her in laughter.

Starring Destiny as Shields and Brian Tyree Henry as her coach, Jason Crutchfield, the movie details the obstacles faced by the aspiring young boxer, which include a dysfunctional home environment and financial insecurity, as she goes from learning the basics of the sport at age 11 to competing at the 2012 London Olympics at 17.

Once she brings home the gold and becomes the first U.S. woman to do so, Shields is confronted by another fierce opponent. The young Black female boxer faces the bias that closes the doors to endorsement deals and wider fame. Shields knows she won't get them unless she fights against the gaps in fairness and equity.

Shields would go on to another win at the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, becoming the only U.S. boxer, male or female, to earn back-to-back gold medals at the games. By then, she had been the subject of a documentary, "T-Rex: Her Fight for Gold." (Shields got the nickname T-Rex early on for her short arms and aggressive punching style.)

"The Fire Inside," inspired by the documentary, was written by Oscar-winning "Moonlight" filmmaker Barry Jenkins. He also was brought in to possibly direct, but he felt that a woman, specifically Morrison, should be in the directing chair. Morrison already had made Oscar history by becoming the first woman nominated in the cinematography category for 2017's "Mudbound."

Filming on "The Fire Inside" began in 2020 and lasted two days before the pandemic lockdown. Shooting resumed two years later, after the project moved from Universal to Amazon MGM.

"The simplest way to put it is that the story of making the movie mirrors a bit of 'Shields' journey, Morrison says.

When the film premiered at Toronto Film Festival in September, it earned strong notices. The Guardian raved that "this is a living, breathing drama of real people and real emotions and one that therefore has real heft to it."

Both Destiny, who grew up in Detroit, and Morrison say they felt a bond to Shields' story. "The fact that we're the same age is crazy," says Destiny, noting that she, like Shields, began striving for success as a tween.

The actress, who has appeared in the Fox series "Star" and the movie "A Girl



Claressa Shields, left, and Ryan Destiny, the Detroit-born actress who plays her, attend the Los Angeles premiere of "The Fire Inside" on Dec. 4.

Aude Guerrucci/REUTERS

Like Grace" with Meagan Good and Garcelle Beauvais, also relates to Shields as a young Black woman from an underdog city. Detroit is "an amazing place to be from," Destiny says, "but I don't think people understand or respect it because they don't know enough about these places (like Detroit and Flint)."

For Morrison, there was resonance in that Shields had to keep proving herself long after a man would have. "This idea that it's not enough just to be good at what you do, but you also have all these other hoops you have to jump through."

"One of the things I could relate to, as a female cinematographer, I'm sort of an exception to the norm. So you're always being viewed through these other optics. For me, it was like, 'Can you carry a camera?' Of course I can carry a camera. The silliest things. But people are kind of undermining you every step of the way."

Adds the director: "We're all badasses and that's not enough. You kind of have to keep proving yourself over and over again."

The delays in filming wound up giving Destiny more time for training and honing her ability to convincingly depict Shields in the ring. The actress says transforming herself physically for the role involved "definitely a lot of sweat, definitely a lot of time. Blood, sweat and tears, as you would say. That is definitely how it went for me."

Shields gives Destiny high marks for realism. "She was doing her scene of running down the street. And people were texting me and calling me, and I was like, 'What do you guys want?' And they're like, 'Are you in Flint?' No. 'Is that not you running down the street?' No, it's not."

Under Morrison's direction, "The Fire Inside" gives viewers a vivid sense of what Shields was going through internally – and sometimes hiding behind a tough, impassive exterior – on her path

to the Olympics. "I really wanted to have the audience feel like they were experiencing it from her perspective," Morrison says.

Shields says she trusted Destiny and Morrison to get it right. "I'm a person that believes if we all do our jobs, everybody's job gets done. I think when we start crossing lines is when stuff gets messed up."

When Shields watched the film at a private screening, she tried to approach it as a moviegoer, not the main character. She says she left impressed by the "great job" done by Destiny, Morrison and Jenkins.

Not long after that screening in January, Shields was able to meet Destiny in person. Destiny, who was having a birthday party, asked Shields whether she would like to meet there.

"I thought to myself ... 'Wow, if she hates this, this is going to be really awkward,'" Destiny recalls.

Shields has nothing but raves for Destiny's acting. "She did a very great job. The clothing, the confidence, the hair, the ferociousness, the attitude. I had the attitude back then. I still have it now."

Perhaps her highest praise is that Destiny's performance was authentic outside and inside the ring. "It shows how great of an actress that she is, because some parts were happy, some were sad, some were tough and rough," Shields says. "And to see her even when punches are being thrown at her, she's not blinking. Boxers do that. Real boxers."

Destiny says she feels changed by the whole experience of "The Fire Inside." So does Morrison, who says: "You have a real-life superhero right here and we got to tell that story. It was such a gift."

The movie has a strong message on the power of persistence and believing in yourself. Says Shields: "When I was getting ready for the 2016 Olympics, everybody kept saying: 'It's impossible for an American (boxer) to win two Olympic gold medals (back to back). It's never happened and it's not going to happen now. Claressa, you've got to know that. What you're trying to do is not possible."

So Shields wrote down the word "impossible" and kept looking at it. "I said, 'What is most important about this word? At the beginning of the word impossible is I'm.' You take that off, what does it say? It's possible."

Destiny, joins in by saying, "I am possible."

The fire inside these women is still going strong.

Barbaro

Continued from Page 1D

vocal coach and guitar teacher, taking lessons a few days a week and practicing daily.

"We started with her iconic qualities, that tight vibrato, the high key, that angelic soaring voice, those very identifiable features," she says. "It was hard for me since I didn't have a relationship with my own singing voice at all. So really, I just aimed at trying to sound like her, even it is impossible to sound like Joan Baez."

Barbaro is seen in "A Complete Unknown" accompanying herself with complex fingerpicking on Baez's trademark Martin six-string. And yet the actress had never played the instrument before.

"I worked on that tons – really, the music process for this whole movie overhauled my life for a year," she says. "Fingerpicking for me was like learning how to walk in your 30s."

For Barbaro, the key to playing Baez was not playing Joan Baez

Ultimately, Barbaro found a way into her character that loosened the reins on her preparation. Suddenly, she stopped pressuring herself to mimic Baez, and instead urged herself to be her own version of the performer.

In a recent Baez interview, "she talked about perfectionism robbing art of what makes it interesting. So I borrowed that," Barbaro says. "I needed that for my own work. To be able to let go."

Barbaro seems both relieved and pleased. She plans to head to a theater with friends when she's home to see herself in Mangold's biopic.

In the dark, she'll be safe. But after this star turn, she might have a harder time walking out of that theater, no longer a complete unknown.



Monica Barbaro played a pilot in "Top Gun: Maverick," alongside Jay Ellis, left, and Danny Ramirez.

PROVIDED BY SCOTT GARFIELD/PARAMOUNT PICTURES

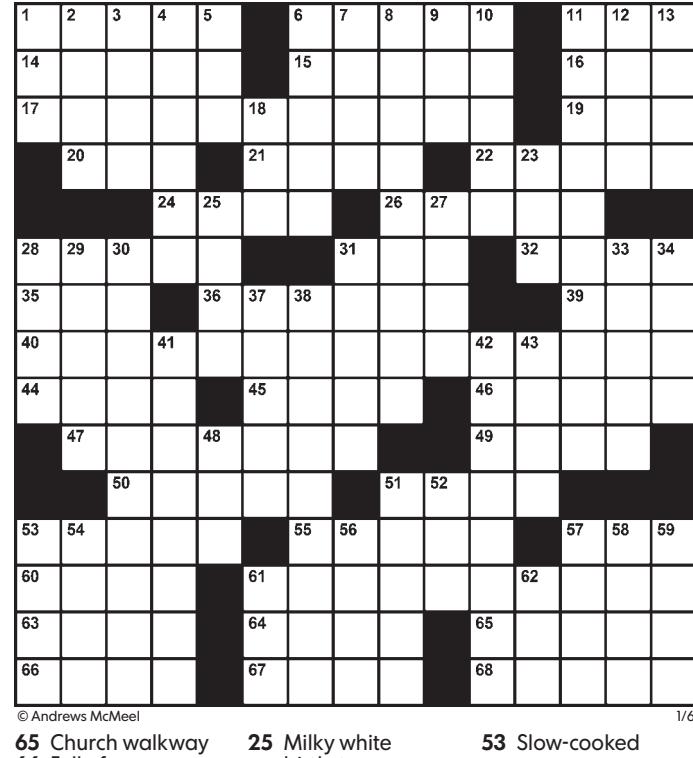
USA TODAY CROSSWORD

EDITED Amanda Rafkin
BY Zhouqin Burnikel

ADD IN

ACROSS

1 Reusable bags
6 Religious subgroups
11 PreCheck org.
14 How solitaire is played
15 "What fun!"
16 Airport with lots of layovers
17 Sleeping with makeup on, for example
19 Feeling crummy
20 "___ can't win 'em all!"
21 Twelve-member oil grp.
22 Debate topic
24 Went by bike
26 Park ranger's uniform color, often
28 Throat affliction
31 Place for an aqua massage
32 "___ that nice?"
35 401(k) alternative
36 Expert in shooting arrows
39 "Yes, captain!"
40 Collectible figurines often seen nodding
44 Drink brand with a two-lizard logo
45 Desserts with crimped crusts
46 "Hasta la vista!"
47 Melanin, for one
49 Age of a typical quinceanera guest
50 Inventor Nikola
51 Long, fluffy scarves
53 Aroma from incense
55 Menace in a comments section
57 Sch. in Columbus
60 "It's not ___ bad"
61 Driving hazards such as car parts, rocks, etc.
63 ___ Grey tea
64 Toddler's boo-boo



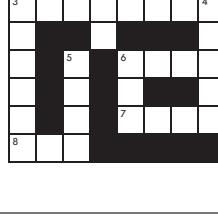
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1/6

65 Church walkway
66 Full of sage advice
67 Wraps up
68 Detanglers' targets
DOWN
1 Key for indenting
2 Skincare brand with a Total Effects line
3 Task list heading
4 Make it through
5 "What did I say?"
6 Show interest (or disinterest) on Tinder
7 Make simpler
8 Legumes in falafel
9 As well
10 Supreme Court justice Sotomayor
11 "So not true!"
12 "Star Trek" lieutenant
13 Fit for the task
18 Common fish for lutefisk
23 Race in a slalom

Answers: Call 1-900-988-8300, 99 cents a minute; or, with a credit card, 1-800-320-4280.

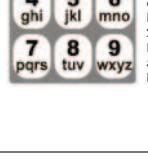
TXTPERT



Across
1. 1,252,7742
3. 3,283,43623
6. 7,656
7. 8,663
8. 4,44

Down
1. 1,252,7746
2. 2,7548
3. 4,38653
5. 5,7464
6. 6,738

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Today's theme
Performing arts

Use the phone keypad to decode the clues. For example: 1 could be A, B or C... and 567 could be DOST

Friday's solution

1/3

Words

WORD ROUNDUP

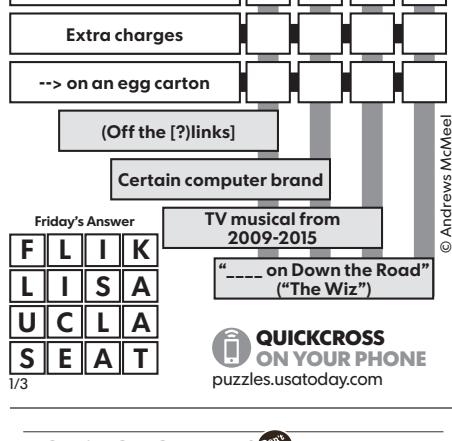
By David L. Hoyt and Jeff Knurek

Find and Circle:
Six birds ending with E
Three poker hands
Three words formed from A-M-R-S
"Emma" author (first/last name)
Two neighboring countries

Friday's answer: TRIANGLE OCTAGON DECAGON HEXAGON
SQUARE CIRCLE OVAL / PARIS SOFIA TOKYO TUNIS / PANDA SKUNK / GATE / CHANNEL

QUICKCROSS

By John Wilmes



UP & DOWN WORDS

By David L. Hoyt and Russell L. Hoyt

1/6

1. GOOD

2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

BREAD

Clues:
1. Hank Williams' "Hey, ____"
2. Improving
3. Boston, to Providence
4. 2005 Charlize Theron film
5. Private golfing venue
6. Triple-decker lunch option
7. Sliced rye, say

Friday's Answer
IN FLORIDA FLORIDA STATE
STATE BIRD
BIRD BOX
BOX UP
UP FOR
FOR REAL

© Andrews McMeel

DON'T QUOTE ME

Writer Lillian Day offers this definition.

“ A ___ IS ___ NEVER ___ HER
UNINTENTIONALLY. ”

© WIGGLES 3D GAMES

Friday's Answer: "I think it's terribly dangerous for an artist to fulfill other people's expectations." - David Bowie

7 LITTLE WORDS

Find the 7 words to match the 7 clues. The numbers in parentheses represent the number of letters in each solution. Each letter combination can be used only once, but all letter combinations will be necessary to complete the puzzle.

CLUES

1 adding to (10)
2 CD precursor (6)
3 they help with stability (8)
4 from Fairbanks, say (7)
5 baby bamboo (6)
6 some tropical biomes (7)
7 "high way" (8)

ME AUG NG LAS ORD
REC TS JU ES KAN
RPA OVE NTI AL SHO
SS OTS NGL AS BAL

Friday's Answers: 1. SHUTTER 2. SWITCHED 3. COMITY
4. RIBBED 5. DUKES 6. BEDLINGTON 7. FANCIFY

JUMBLE

Unscramble these Jumbles, one letter per square, to form four ordinary words.

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Answer here:

(Answers tomorrow)

FRIDAY'S Jumbles: PENNY DAZED ORATOR INCOME

Answer: When his luggage didn't fit into the overhead bin, the passenger — CARRIED ON AND ON

Numbers

More puzzles: puzzles.usatoday.com
Want solutions? answers.usatoday.com
Feedback: feedback@usatoday.com

SUDOKU

Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x3 box contains the numbers 1 through 9 (no repeats).



1/6 DIFFICULTY RATING ★★★★★

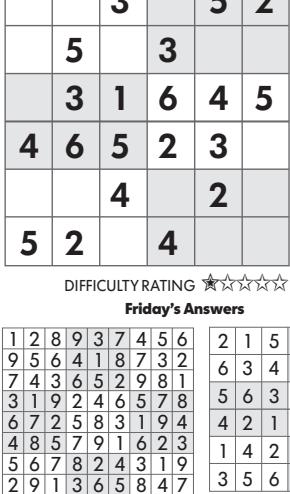
SUDOKU FUSION

ON YOUR PHONE

puzzles.usatoday.com

© Andrews McMeel

Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x3 box contains the numbers 1 through 6 (no repeats).



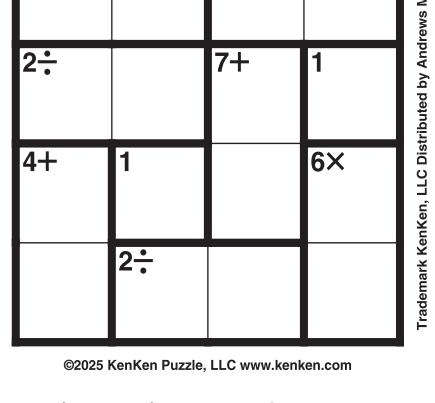
1/6 DIFFICULTY RATING ★★★★★

Friday's Answers

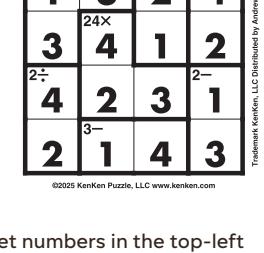
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KENKEN



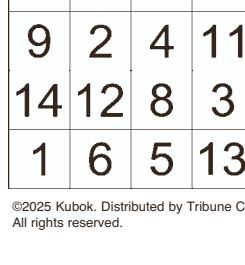
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CROSSWORDS
SOLUTION

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1. Each row and column must contain the numbers 1 through 4 (easy) or 1 through 6 (challenging) without repeating.
2. The numbers within the heavily outlined boxes, called cages, must combine using the given operation (in any order) to produce the target numbers in the top-left corners.
3. Freebies: fill in single-box cages with the number in the top-left corner.

Enter the missing numbers from 1 to 16 without repetitions so the sum of the four numbers in each row and column is the same as the corresponding circled number.



Solution to Friday's puzzle

7 10 15 16

9 2 4 11

14 12 8 3

1 6 5 13

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1/6/25

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USA TODAY

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NATION & WORLD **EXTRA**

INSIDE

Golden Globes
kick off new year.
6NN



A salt truck drives downtown during a snow storm in Cincinnati, Ohio, on Sunday. ALBERT CESARE/VIA REUTERS

WINTER STORM HITS CENTRAL US

Snowy, freezing weather takes aim at Washington

REUTERS

A winter storm brought snow, ice and freezing temperatures to a broad swath of the U.S. on Sunday, with some 60 million people across more than a dozen states from Kansas to New Jersey under winter storm warnings, advisories or watches.

The storm was moving toward the mid-Atlantic, where Washington, D.C. was bracing for heavy snow and bitter cold on Monday, the same day the U.S. Congress is set to meet and formally certify Republican Donald Trump's election as president.

Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson told Fox News on Sunday the weather would not prevent lawmakers from carrying out their duties.

Kansas and parts of northwestern Missouri were enduring blizzard conditions into Sunday afternoon, the National Weather Service said. Roadways were blanketed in snow and ice, and officials urged residents to avoid travel.

Total snowfall of between six and 12 inches was expected from southern Ohio to Washington.

In northern Kentucky and southern West Virginia, freezing rain and sleet will produce "hazardous ice accumulations," the service said. The back end of the storm system, meanwhile, was producing severe thunderstorms capable of spinning off tornadoes in Arkansas,



People cross the street in Manhattan during cold weather in New York City on Sunday. ADAM GRAY/REUTERS

Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama.

The storm forced the cancellation of hundreds of flights, including more than 275 in both Kansas City and St. Louis, according to the aviation tracking website FlightAware.

Governors in several states, including Kansas, Kentucky, Arkansas, West Virginia and Virginia, declared states of

emergency.

The storm will move offshore by Monday night, but bone-chilling arctic air is set to move in behind it, with daytime temperatures on Monday and Tuesday predicted to be 10 to 20 degrees F below average from the Great Plains to the East Coast, according to the weather service.

Winter storm won't delay Trump election certification in Congress

Doina Chiacu

REUTERS

WASHINGTON — A massive winter storm moving across the United States will not keep the U.S. Congress from meeting on Monday to formally certify Republican Donald Trump's election as president, Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson said on Sunday.

"The Electoral Count Act requires this on January 6 at 1 p.m. — so, whether we're in a blizzard or not we're going to be in that chamber making sure this is done," Johnson told Fox News' "Sunday Morning Futures" in an interview.

Johnson said he hoped there would be full attendance despite the storm and that he had encouraged lawmakers to stay in the city.

Forecasts called for heavy snow and high winds from the Central Plains to

"The Electoral Count Act requires this on January 6 at 1 p.m. — so, whether we're in a blizzard or not we're going to be in that chamber making sure this is done."

Mike Johnson
Republican House Speaker

the mid-Atlantic states, the National Weather Service said. Severe weather advisories were issued across the eastern half of the country, including blizzard warnings in parts of Kansas.

In Washington, mixed snow and sleet accumulations were expected to be be-

tween three and seven inches, promising a difficult commute and possible closings of schools, government and businesses.

Bad winter weather can wreak havoc in the Washington metropolitan area, which has seen mild winters in recent decades and has at times been unprepared for accumulations of snow or ice. The city ordered public schools closed on Monday and school cancellations were also announced in several suburban Virginia counties. School systems in neighboring Maryland were likely to follow suit.

Members of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives returned to Washington on Friday after the winter break and Republicans gathered on Saturday with Johnson to discuss

See CERTIFICATION, Page 5NN

US ethics czar to vet new officials

Incoming new Trump Cabinet prep for jobs

**Heather Timmons
and Gabriella Borter**
REUTERS

WASHINGTON — The top U.S. ethics official charged with preventing government workers' conflicts of interest is about to take the hotseat in Washington, as President-elect Donald Trump's new Cabinet and other appointees declare their financial assets and prepare for their new jobs.

"We are in touch with the transition team and working with them," said David Huitema recently when he sat down with Reuters for his first official interview since being sworn in for the job on Dec. 16. The inauguration will be Jan. 20.

Ethics experts say the director of the Office of Government Ethics, or OGE, is in the spotlight during any presidential transition, but Huitema faces special challenges ahead of Trump's second term, evaluating a myriad of business ties for Trump, his family and advisers.

Experts pointed to the short, rocky tenure of Walter Shaub, the last person to hold the job when Trump entered the White House, and noted that several of Trump's latest nominees have expressed disdain for the agencies they will run.

After nine years as ethics chief at the U.S. State Department, Huitema will spearhead the OGE's standard task of helping scrutinize dozens of new Senate-vetted nominees and thousands of political appointees for potential financial and personal conflicts.

If he does his job well, chances are good Huitema could be fired fairly promptly, Shaub warned in an open letter last month. Huitema told Reuters he has faith in the intentions of most new entrants to government.

He shared his views on ethics education and maintaining the public trust, but declined to answer specific questions about the incoming administration. The ethics office only deals with potential government employees, he noted. That means it will not vet outside advisers like billionaires Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy, who Trump has asked to recommend cuts in government spending.

Q: What does the OGE do, exactly?
A: "The ultimate goal is to ensure that federal employees are making decisions based on national interest and policy priorities of the administration rather than any personal interest especially financial interest. ... The OGE itself is a small agency of just about 75 employees, but we work with a team of about 4,000 ethics officials interspersed, who engage more directly with federal employees."

One important immediate task, he said, will be "with nominee financial disclosure, helping ensure that nominees for Senate confirmed positions

See ETHICS, Page 5NN



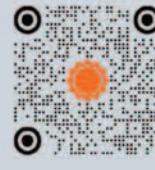
David Huitema, Director of the Office of Government Ethics, sits down with Reuters for his first interview on the job, at his office in Washington on Thursday. EVELYN HOCKSTEIN/REUTERS



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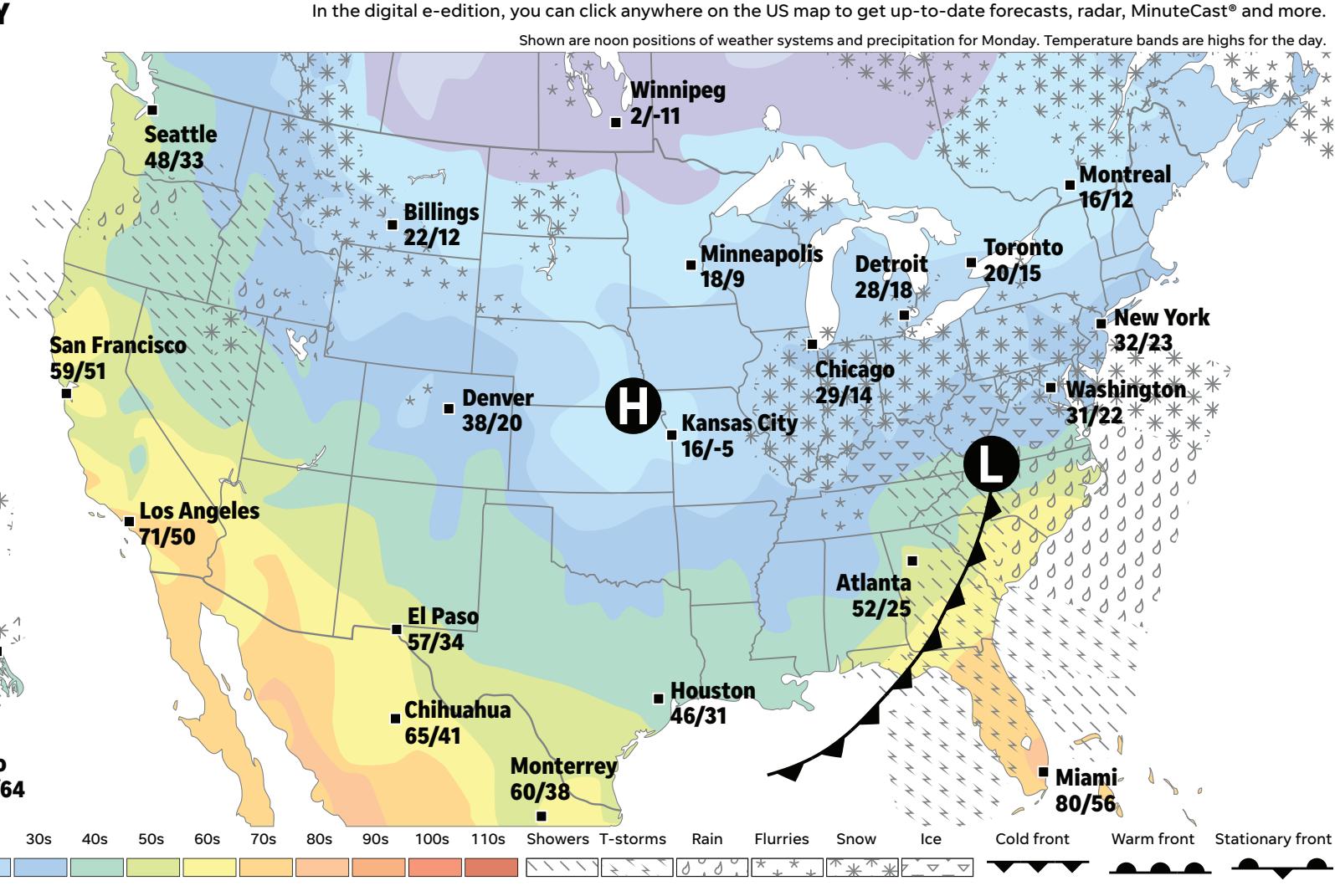
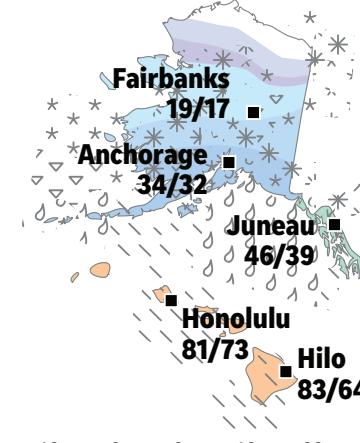
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NATIONAL SUMMARY

A substantial winter storm will bring snow to parts of the mid-Atlantic today, including major metros like Washington D.C. and Baltimore. Cold air will continue to dominate across the central and eastern U.S., while the southern tier of the country remains dry. Snow showers will dot portions of the Rockies.



SUNDAY EXTREMES

NATIONAL (for the 48 contiguous states)

High: 92 at McAllen, TX
Low: -28 at Bottineau, ND
Precip: 1.51" at Fullerton, LA

INTERNATIONAL (excludes Antarctica)

High: 112 at Oodnadatta, Australia
Low: -61 at Suhana, Russia
Precip: 4.65" at Sumbawanga, Tanzania

TODAY IN HISTORY

On Jan. 6, 1884, Atlanta, Ga., had a low of 1 below zero. On the same date in 1983, all 50 states had at least one reporting point with above-freezing temperatures, which is very rare for winter.

WEATHER TRIVIA™

Q: Where did the word Chinook originate?

A: It was the name of an Indian tribe of the Columbia River Basin

NATIONAL CITIES MONDAY

	High/low/W	Air Quality		High/low/W	Air Quality		High/low/W	Air Quality			High/low/W	Air Quality
Aberdeen, SD	14/3/c	30	● Evansville, IN	29/18/sn	20	● Levittown, PA	30/21/sn	42	● Rochester, NY	24/17/sf	24	
Abilene, TX	40/24/s	39	● Fall River, MA	32/19/c	38	● Lincoln, IL	28/3/sn	23	● Rockford, IL	28/13/s	33	
● Accomac, VA	40/22/i	21	● Farmington, NM	44/23/pc	50	● Louisville, KY	30/12/sn	37	● Ruidoso, NM	44/20/pc	50	
Adrian, MI	28/19/sn	24	● Fayetteville, NC	60/29/r	18	● Lubbock, TX	44/23/s	43	● Salem, OR	55/32/pc	41	
● Akron, OH	26/20/sn	25	● Fond du Lac, WI	24/9/s	36	● Manitowoc, WI	26/14/pc	33	● Salina, KS	13/-5/s	34	
Alamogordo, NM	52/26/s	51	● Fort Myers, FL	78/48/c	40	● Mansfield, OH	26/14/sn	21	● Marshall, NC	44/20/r	16	
● Alexandria, VA	31/20/sn	52	● Fort Smith, AR	34/18/s	25	● Marshfield, WI	24/9/s	28	● Massillon, OH	27/20/sn	35	
● Alliance, OH	27/20/sn	28	● Framingham, MA	32/17/pc	29	● McLean, VA	30/19/sn	40	● McLean, VA	30/19/sn	40	
Amarillo, TX	42/18/s	43	● Freeport, IL	28/12/s	40	● Melbourne, FL	78/39/pc	44	● Melbourne, FL	78/39/pc	44	
Ames, IA	21/7/pc	32	● Fremont, OH	29/18/sn	28	● Memphis, TN	34/26/s	34	● Memphis, TN	34/26/s	34	
● Anderson, SC	49/25/r	15	● Fort Collins, CO	34/20/pc	51	● Middletown, NY	30/16/c	32	● Middletown, NY	30/16/c	32	
Appleton, WI	26/12/s	31	● Gadsden, AL	39/26/pc	23	● Milford, MA	31/16/pc	29	● Milwaukee, WI	29/17/s	51	
● Asheville, NC	48/22/r	20	● Gainesville, FL	72/32/t	40	● Monroe, MI	28/19/sn	26	● Monroe, MI	28/19/sn	26	
Ashland, OH	27/15/sn	32	● Galesburg, IL	25/9/s	27	● Monroe, LA	42/27/s	34	● Monroe, LA	42/27/s	34	
● Athens, GA	52/26/r	17	● Gastonia, NC	48/23/r	24	● Montgomery, AL	44/27/pc	21	● Montgomery, AL	44/27/pc	21	
● Augusta, GA	59/26/r	27	● Glen Rose, TX	40/23/s	39	● Muncie, IN	27/12/sn	22	● Muncie, IN	27/12/sn	22	
Austin, TX	47/27/pc	46	● Gonzales, LA	47/29/s	34	● Murfreesboro, TN	36/24/sn	27	● Murfreesboro, TN	36/24/sn	27	
Bartlesville, OK	25/9/s	23	● Great Falls, MT	22/15/c	59	● Naples, FL	76/52/pc	36	● Naples, FL	76/52/pc	36	
● Battle Creek, MI	26/19/sn	20	● Green Bay, WI	26/12/s	26	● Nashville, TN	35/27/sn	28	● Neptune, NJ	31/21/sn	43	
● Bedford, IN	28/13/sn	25	● Greenville, SC	52/26/r	14	● New Bedford, MA	33/18/c	27	● New Bedford, MA	33/18/c	27	
● Binghamton, NY	21/12/c	25	● Hackensack, NJ	32/21/sn	48	● New Bern, NC	63/29/r	23	● New Bern, NC	63/29/r	23	
● Bluffton, SC	65/32/r	22	● Hagerstown, MD	27/19/sn	28	● New Philadelphia, OH	27/19/sn	28	● New Philadelphia, OH	27/19/sn	28	
Bremerton, WA	48/30/s	37	● Hattiesburg, MS	43/27/s	23	● Newark, OH	28/13/sn	28	● Newark, OH	28/13/sn	28	
Brockton, MA	32/18/c	32	● Henderson, KY	27/17/sn	29	● Newton, NJ	31/18/sn	31	● Newton, NJ	31/18/sn	31	
Brownwood, TX	43/21/s	38	● Hendersonville, NC	50/22/r	21	● New York, NY	32/23/sn	52	● New York, NY	32/23/sn	52	
Burlington, IA	24/8/s	30	● Herkimer, NY	19/6/pc	27	● Norwich, CT	31/15/c	27	● North Olmsted, OH	32/23/sn	52	
● Burlington, NC	43/23/r	18	● Hillsdale, MI	24/17/sn	22	● Ocala, FL	76/33/t	38	● North Olmsted, OH	32/23/sn	52	
Burlington, VT	17/13/c	26	● Holland, MI	26/19/c	23	● Oklahoma City, OK	31/13/s	29	● North Olmsted, OH	32/23/sn	52	
Cambridge, OH	28/18/sn	19	● Hornell, NY	24/15/sf	22	● Opelousas, LA	43/28/s	30	● North Olmsted, OH	32/23/sn	52	
● Canadensis, NY	23/16/sf	24	● Howell, MI	24/17/pc	22	● Oshkosh, WI	25/9/s	27	● North Olmsted, OH	32/23/sn	52	
Canton, OH	26/20/sn	41	● Hutchinson, KS	13/-4/s	32	● Palm Beach, FL	79/52/pc	34	● North Olmsted, OH	32/23/sn	52	
Carlsbad, NM	44/26/pc	45	● Hyannis, MA	31/20/c	27	● Palm Springs, CA	76/54/s	52	● North Olmsted, OH	32/23/sn	52	
● Chambersburg, PA	27/18/sn	29	● Indianapolis, IN	27/15/sn	25	● Panama City, FL	67/33/r	30	● North Olmsted, OH	32/23/sn	52	
● Cherry Hill, NJ	30/21/sn	52	● Iowa City, IA	25/11/s	36	● Pekin, IL	30/6/sn	33	● North Olmsted, OH	32/23/sn	52	
● Cincinnati, OH	27/10/sn	28	● Ithaca, NY	22/12/sf	21	● Pensacola, FL	53/30/s	38	● North Olmsted, OH	32/23/sn	52	
Clarksville, TN	31/25/sn	21	● Jackson, MS	39/27/pc	37	● Peoria, IL	28/10/sn	32	● Peoria, IL	28/10/sn	32	
● Coldwater, MI	25/17/sn	22	● Jackson, TN	31/25/c	24	● Petersburg, VA	37/17/i	28	● Petersburg, VA	37/17/i	28	
● Columbus, OH	28/14/sn	20	● Jacksonville, FL	71/32/t	37	● Phoenix, AZ	72/45/s	65	● Phoenix, AZ	72/45/s	65	
● Corning, NY	26/16/c	21	● Jefferson, NC	65/28/r	25	● Port Huron, MI	26/18/sn	23	● Port Huron, MI	26/18/sn	23	
● Corpus Christi, TX	56/36/s	45	● Kent, OH	27/21/sn	34	● Portsmouth, NH	29/16/pc	23	● Portsmouth, NH	29/16/pc	23	
● Daytona Beach, FL	76/35/t	46	● Kewanee, IL	30/10/s	40	● Poughkeepsie, NY	30/17/c	28	● Poughkeepsie, NY	30/17/c	28	
Deming, NM	57/28/s	52	● Damascus	56/35/pc	56	● Providence, RI	31/18/c	32	● Providence, RI	31/18/c	32	
DeRidder, LA	43/26/s	29	● Dublin	38/31/s	38	● Pueblo, CO	37/22/s	51	● Providence, RI	31/18/c	32	
Des Moines, IA	20/8/pc	34	● El Paso	75/56/pc	55	● Quincy, MA	32/18/pc	37	● Providence, RI	31/18/c	32	
● Detroit, MI	28/18/sn	45	● El Paso	75/56/pc	55	● Redding, CA	64/51/s	44	● Providence, RI	31/18/c	32	
● Devils Lake, ND	7/8/sn	23	● El Paso	75/56/pc	55	● Reno, NV	50/32/pc	51	● Providence, RI	31/18/c	32	
Dover, NH	28/14/pc	30	● El Paso	75/56/pc	55	● Ravenna, OH	28/20/sn	31	● Providence, RI	31/18/c	32	
El Paso, TX	57/34/s	53	● El Paso	75/56/pc	55	● Richmond, IN	26/6/sn	33	● Providence, RI	31/18/c	32	
Elmira, NY	26/17/c	22	● El Paso	75/56/pc	55	● Rome	62/55/c	43	● Providence, RI	31/18/c	32	
● Erie, PA	27/20/c	20	● El Paso	75/56/pc	55	● San Jose	82/69/r	83/69/c	● Providence, RI	31/18/c	32	
Eugene, OR	53/33/pc	38	● El Paso	75/56/pc	55	● San Salvador	87/64/s	87/64/t	● Providence, RI	31/18/c	32	

Air Quality Index: 0-50, Good;

IN BRIEF

FBI probe New Orleans attack suspect's visits to Egypt, Canada

The FBI is looking into past visits to Egypt and Canada by the suspect in the New Year's Day attack in New Orleans that killed 14 people after a truck was rammed into a crowd of revelers, an FBI official told reporters on Sunday.

Shamsud-Din Jabbar, a U.S. Army veteran aged 42 who had pledged allegiance to the Islamic State extremist group, was the suspect in the attack and the FBI says he acted alone. He was killed in a shootout with police after the rampage, which also injured dozens of people and has been labeled by the FBI as an act of terrorism.

"We have also tracked that Jabbar traveled to Cairo, Egypt, from June 22 until July 3 of 2023. A few days later he flew to Ontario, Canada, on July 10 and returned to the U.S. on July 13 of 2023," Lyonel Myrthil, FBI special agent in charge of the New Orleans field office, said at a press briefing.

"Our agents are getting answers as to where he went, who he met with and how those trips may or may not tie into his actions in our city in New Orleans," he added.

The FBI also said Jabbar made at least two trips to New Orleans in the months prior to the attack, one in October and the other in November.

The suspect stayed in a rental home in New Orleans during that time, the FBI said, adding he recorded videos with Meta glasses traveling through the French Quarter, the neighborhood in New Orleans where the attack occurred on Bourbon Street.

Biden signs Social Security measure into law to expand benefits for some retirees

WASHINGTON – President Joe Biden signed a measure into law on Sunday that boosts Social Security retirement payments to some retirees who draw public pensions, such as former police officers and firefighters, in what the White House described as the first expansion of such benefits in 20 years.

The Senate voted last month to approve the Social Security Fairness Act, which would repeal two-decade-old provisions that can reduce benefits for people who also receive a pension. The House of Representatives had approved it earlier.

"The bill I'm signing today is about a simple proposition: Americans who have worked hard all their lives ... should be able to retire with economic security and dignity," Biden said. "That's the entire purpose of the Social Security system crafted by Franklin Delano Roosevelt nearly 90 years ago."

The law overturns a decades-old change to the popular retirement program that had been made to limit federal benefits to some higher-earning workers with pensions.

Zelenskyy: Kyiv security guarantees will only work if US provides them

KYIV - Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said late on Sunday that security guarantees for Kyiv to end Russia's war would only be effective if the United States provides them, and he hoped to meet U.S. President-elect Donald Trump soon after his inauguration.

In an interview with U.S. podcaster Lex Fridman, Zelenskyy praised the incoming U.S. president, who has vowed to rapidly end the war without explaining how, saying Ukrainians were counting on him to compel Moscow to agree to a lasting peace.

Almost three years after Russia's invasion, the election of Trump, who returns to the White House on Jan. 20, has sparked hope of a diplomatic resolution to stop the war, but also fears in Kyiv that a quick peace could come at a high price.

Zelenskyy used the three-hour interview published on YouTube to call for Kyiv's NATO membership and emphasized his belief that a ceasefire without security guarantees for Kyiv would merely give Russia time to re-arm for a new attack.

The Ukrainian leader said the White House under Trump had a vital role to play in providing security guarantees and asserted he and the U.S. president-elect saw eye to eye on the need for a "peace through strength" approach to ending the conflict.

"Without the United States security guarantees are not possible. I mean these security guarantees that can prevent Russian aggression," he said.

He said he needed to sit down with Trump to determine a course of action to halt Russia, and European governments needed to have a voice in that process before Kyiv could sit down for direct talks with the Russian side.

REUTERS

Musk turns on UK's Farage

He says he should quit as Reform party leader

William Schomberg

REUTERS

LONDON – Elon Musk said Nigel Farage should quit as leader of Britain's right-wing Reform UK party in an abrupt withdrawal of support by the U.S. billionaire for the Brexit campaigner who is trying to shake up the British political establishment again.

"The Reform Party needs a new leader. Farage doesn't have what it takes," Musk said on his social media platform X on Sunday, a few hours after Farage described him as a friend who made Reform look "cool".

Musk – a close ally of U.S. President-elect Donald Trump – had seemingly backed Farage and posed for a photograph with him last month.

Reform won 4.1 million votes or 14% of the total and five seats in parliament in last July's national election.

Farage has previously said he is in negotiations with Musk about the billionaire donating to Reform to help it challenge the dominant Labour and Conservative parties.

But Farage has distanced himself from comments made by Musk in sup-



Musk



Farage

port of British anti-immigration and anti-Muslim activist Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, known by the pseudonym Tommy Robinson, who is serving a prison sentence for contempt of court.

Farage responded to Musk's post on Sunday saying: "Well, this is a surprise! Elon is a remarkable individual but on this I am afraid I disagree. My view remains that Tommy Robinson is not right for Reform and I never sell out my principles."

Last month, Musk endorsed the Alternative for Germany, an anti-immigration, anti-Islamic party labeled as right-wing-extremist by German security services, ahead of national elections in February.

Musk has previously sought to influence British politics and has criticized Prime Minister Keir Starmer repeatedly since anti-immigration riots last summer.

The Tesla founder last week backed

calls for a national inquiry into the handling of rape cases by men of Pakistani heritage of underage girls by the government's prosecution service which Starmer previously ran.

A 2014 inquiry found at least 1,400 children were subjected to sexual exploitation in Rotherham, northern England, between 1997 and 2013.

The Times said Starmer was expected to address the criticism at a news conference on Monday by saying he gave the green light to prosecuting pedophile gangs in 2013 and reformed the way that child abuse cases are handled by prosecutors.

But he was unlikely to criticize Musk directly given the billionaire's proximity to Trump, the newspaper said.

A spokesperson in Starmer's office declined to comment.

On Sunday, UK health minister Wes Streeting defended Starmer and another member of his cabinet, Jess Phillips, who incurred Musk's ire for reportedly saying that any fresh inquiry into another gang rape case should be handled by the local authority.

"It's all very easy to sit there and fire off something in haste and click 'send' when people like Keir Starmer and Jess Phillips have done the hard yards of actually locking up wife beaters, rapists and pedophiles," Streeting told the BBC.

Ukraine launches new attack in Kursk region of Russia

War bloggers: Russian troops under pressure

Mark Trevelyan and Lucy Papachristou

REUTERS

Russia said on Sunday that Ukraine had launched a new attack in the Kursk region, an area of western Russia from which Russian troops have been trying to eject Ukrainian forces for the past five months.

Ukrainian troops broke across the border in a surprise incursion on Aug. 6 and have managed to hold on to a chunk of territory there which could provide Kyiv with an important bargaining chip in potential peace talks.

Russia's defense ministry said its forces were beating back the Ukrainian forces but some reports from Russian military bloggers suggested the Russian side had come under heavy pressure.

Andriy Yermak, the head of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's office, posted on Telegram that there was "good news" from Kursk, adding: "Russia is getting what it deserves."

Andriy Kovalenko, the head of Ukraine's official Center Against Disinformation, wrote on Telegram that Russian troops were attacked in several places.

The Russian statement said Ukraine attacked around 0600 GMT near the village of Berdin with two tanks, a mine-clearing vehicle and 12 armored combat vehicles with paratroopers.

"Artillery and aviation of the North group of (Russian) forces defeated the assault group of the Ukrainian Armed Forces," it added.

The statement said two Ukrainian attacks had been repelled. Reuters



People wait at a bus stop next to a reinforced concrete bomb shelter installed in a street in the course of Russia-Ukraine conflict, in Kursk, Russia on Aug. 28, 2024. The sign on the construction reads: "Shelter." MAXIM SHMETOV/REUTERS

could not independently verify the situation on the ground.

Reports from Russia's widely read war bloggers, who support Moscow's war in Ukraine but have often reported critically on failings and setbacks, indicated that the Ukrainian assault had put Russian forces at least temporarily on the defensive.

"Despite strong pressure from the enemy, our units are heroically holding the line," the Operativnye Svodki (Operational Reports) channel said in the first hours after the attack.

In a later update, another influential blogger, Yuri Podolyak, said Russian units had gained control of the situation after initial "mistakes" and encircled Ukrainian forces north of a highway leading to the regional capital Kursk.

Acting Kursk governor Alexander Khinshtain told people to trust only official sources, and warned displaced residents not to return to unsafe areas with-

out permission.

Ukrainian and Western assessments say that some 11,000 troops from Russia's ally North Korea have been deployed in the Kursk region to support Moscow's forces. Russia has neither confirmed nor denied their presence.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Saturday: "In battles yesterday and today near just one village, Makhnovka, in Kursk region, the Russian army lost up to a battalion of North Korean infantry soldiers and Russian paratroopers."

He did not provide specific details. A battalion can vary in size but is generally made up of several hundred troops.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said in response to a question at his marathon annual phone-in last month that Russia would definitely drive Ukrainian forces out of Kursk but declined to set a date for when this would happen.

Austria heads toward right-led coalition talks

Francois Murphy

REUTERS

VIENNA – Austria headed on Sunday towards coalition talks led by the far-right Freedom Party after efforts to form a centrist government without the FPO fell apart and prompted Chancellor Karl Nehammer to resign.

Nehammer, who announced he was quitting late on Saturday, had led three- and then two-party talks aimed at forging a centrist coalition that could serve as a bulwark against the euroskeptic, Russia-friendly FPO, which came first in September's parliamentary election with around 29% of the vote.

Nehammer's conservative People's Party (OVP) appointed Secretary-General Christian Stocker on Sunday as its new leader in an interim capacity. Stocker has long repeated Nehammer's position that the OVP would not govern with FPO leader Herbert Kickl, but said on Sunday things had now

changed.

"I expect that the leader of the party with the most votes will be tasked with forming a future government. If we are invited to these (coalition) talks, we will accept this invitation," Stocker told reporters.

"It is therefore not about Herbert Kickl or me, but about the fact that this country needs a stable government right now."

The OVP is the only parliamentary party not to have ruled out a coalition with the FPO outright, and together they would have a majority in parliament. Nehammer focused his fire on Kickl, arguing he was a conspiracy theorist. Kickl insisted he would be chancellor in any FPO-led government.

President Alexander Van der Bellen, a former leader of the left-wing Greens who has voiced reservations about Kickl becoming chancellor, infuriated the

FPO by not asking it to form a government soon after the election on the grounds that no other party was willing to join it in a coalition.

While saying the situation had now changed, Van der Bellen stopped short of tasking Kickl with forming a government. He is due to meet Kickl at 11 a.m. local time on Monday.

"Voices within the People's Party that rule out cooperation with an FPO under Herbert Kickl have become much quieter. This in turn means that a new path may be opening up that did not exist before," Van der Bellen said in an address to the nation.

The FPO has been a junior partner in coalition governments before, most recently with the OVP from 2017 to 2019, but it has never led one since it was formed in the 1950s under a leader who had been an SS officer and Nazi lawmaker.

The failure of Nehammer's coalition talks highlights the growing difficulty for centrist parties.

Van der Bellen

REUTERS

WALL ST WEEK AHEAD

Jobs report poses first big stocks test of 2025

Lewis Krauskopf
REUTERS

NEW YORK – The stock market faces its first major test of the year in the coming week, with investors counting on the U.S. jobs report to show a stable but not overheated economy that underpins expectations for equity gains in 2025.

Stocks wobbled at the end of December and the start of January, cooling off after a torrid run.

The benchmark S&P 500 closed 2024 with a 23% rise and posted its biggest two-year gain since 1997-1998.

Prospects for a third straight standout year hinge in part on the strength of the economy, with labor market data among the most important reads into the economy's health.

The data could also help clarify the Federal Reserve's interest rate plans after the central bank last month rattled markets by reducing its projected rate cuts for 2025.

"Investors are going to want to see confirmation that labor trends remain solid, which means the economic outlook probably remains firm," said Anthony Saglimbene, chief market strategist at Ameriprise Financial.

"Any kind of data that suggests things are weakening a little bit more than expected I think could create volatility," Saglimbene said.

Investors enter the year generally upbeat about the U.S. economy. A Natixis Investment Managers survey conducted at the end of last year found 73% of institutional investors said the U.S. will avoid a recession in 2025.

Labor market data has been volatile in recent months following aerospace industry strikes and hurricanes. November data showed growth of 227,000 jobs that rebounded from a tepid rise in October.

The three-month average gain of 138,000 "suggests that hiring continues to slow gradually," Capital Economics analysts said in a note.

The report for December, due out on Jan 10, is expected to show growth of 150,000 jobs with the unemployment rate at 4.2%, according to a Reuters poll of economists.

Following the prior two reports, "this is going to be probably the first clean read of what is the underlying trend in the labor market," said Angelo Kourkafas, senior investment strategist at Edward Jones.

Investors are also wary of the jobs report revealing an overly strong economy, with a revival of inflation seen as one of the key risks to markets early in the year.

The Fed at its December meeting lifted its forecast for expected inflation in 2025, paving the way for higher interest rates than it previously forecast.

After lowering its benchmark rate at three straight meetings, the Fed is expected to pause its easing cycle when it next meets at the end of January before making further cuts of about 50 basis points over the rest of the year.

For the jobs report, the market is "looking for that Goldilocks number – neither too hot, nor too cold," Kourkafas said.

Other employment data

While the payrolls data will be the most closely followed release, the coming week brings other market-sensitive employment figures, as well as reports on factory orders and the services sector.

Despite a strong 2024, stocks were weak in December, with the S&P 500 falling 2.5%. December had only five days with more stocks in the index gaining as opposed to declining, the lowest share of such relatively positive days for any month going back to 1990, according to Bespoke Investment Group.

Following the end-of-year holiday period, "next week probably ushers in more robust volumes, which would certainly be a better indication of directionality for the market," said Art Hogan, chief market strategist at B. Riley Wealth.

"A solid jobs report would certainly help turn things around in this market that has otherwise been pretty soft to end the year and start the new year," Hogan said.

Threat of tariffs will loom large amid auto, tech glitz at CES

Abhirup Roy
REUTERS

SAN FRANCISCO – Auto and tech giants showing off their latest innovations at the CES trade show in Las Vegas this week can expect a barrage of questions on a topic that is usually not central to the consumer-focused event: tariffs.

The gathering is one of the largest of manufacturers, analysts and suppliers in the United States and comes days before the inauguration of President-elect Donald Trump, who has pledged big tariffs on imports from Canada, Mexico, China and other U.S. trading partners. This has sparked concerns about spiraling costs for businesses as well as consumers.

"This will be a hot topic," said strategy consultant Deborah Weinstig, CEO of Coresight Research, who said the proposed tariffs have come up in almost every conversation she has had with clients ahead of CES. "This is going to be something that definitely senior leadership is going to have to address."

CES 2025, formerly known as the Consumer Electronics Show, runs Jan. 7-10 and is used to debut products ranging from new automotive technology to quirky gadgets, as well showing new ways to use artificial intelligence. Among the highlights this year is a keynote speech from AI chip giant Nvidia's celebrity CEO, Jensen Huang.

While AI will still be the buzzword on the show floor, the issue of tariffs will be top-of-mind in policy sessions, press conferences and on the sidelines.

Companies may be asked about changing suppliers and moving production to the United States to mitigate supply-chain disruptions –



A statue of the Android mascot is displayed at last year's CES in Las Vegas. CES is used to debut products ranging from new automotive technology to quirky gadgets. STEVE MARCUS/REUTERS FILE

moves that take time and are expensive, analysts have said. Honda, for instance, sends 80% of its Mexican output to the U.S. market. It has warned it would have to think about shifting production if the United States were to impose permanent tariffs on vehicles imported from the country.

Nearly half of new cars sold in the U.S. as well as a significant share of parts on the rest are made elsewhere, according to estimates from Edmunds. European and American carmakers could lose up to 17% of their combined annual core profits if the U.S. imposes import tariffs on Europe, Mexico and Canada, according to an S&P Global report.

Planning in 'hyper mode'

In addition to tariffs, Trump has said he plans to begin rescinding policies meant to promote the adoption of

EVs.

Many suppliers, already struggling because of weaker than expected EV demand, are operating on "razor-thin" margins and will have to radically adapt their cost structure this year in the face of potential tariffs, said Felix Stellmaszek, global leader of the automotive and mobility sector at Boston Consulting Group.

"Add to this supply-chain uncertainties and labor shortages and it's clear that many suppliers are in dire straits," he said. "The scenario planning is in hyper mode."

Between responding to potential tariffs, automakers and their suppliers – including Honda, Toyota, Bosch, and Continental – are expected to provide updates on their race to develop cars with software-driven enhancements, self-driving technology and AI that makes vehicles easier and safer to drive.

Fed's Kugler, Daly say bank's job not done on addressing nation's inflation

Ann Saphir
REUTERS

Two Federal Reserve policymakers on Saturday said they feel the U.S. central bank's job of taming inflation is not yet done, but also signaled they do not want to risk damaging the labor market as they try to finish that job.

The remarks, from Governor Adriana Kugler and San Francisco Fed President Mary Daly, highlight the delicate balancing act facing U.S. central bankers this year as they look to slow their pace of rate-cutting. The Fed lowered short-term rates by a full percentage point last year, to a current range of 4.25%-4.50%.

Inflation by the Fed's preferred measure is well down from its mid-2022 peak of around 7%, registering 2.4% in November. Still that's above the Fed's 2% goal, and in December policymakers projected slower



Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco President Mary Daly and Federal Reserve Board Governor Adriana Kugler pose as they attend the American Economics Association's annual conference in San Francisco, Calif., on Saturday. ANN SAPHIR/REUTERS

progress toward that goal than they had earlier anticipated.

"We are fully aware that we are not there yet – no one is popping champagne anywhere," Kugler said at the an-

nual American Economic Association conference in San Francisco. "And at the same time ... we want the unemployment rate to stay where it is" and not increase rapidly.

In November, unemployment was 4.2%, consistent in both her and colleague Daly's view with maximum employment, the Fed's second goal alongside its price stability goal.

"At this point, I would not want to see further slowing in the labor market – maybe gradually moving around in bumps and chunks on a given month, but certainly not additional slowing in the labor market," said Daly, who was speaking on the same panel.

The policymakers were not asked, nor did they volunteer their views, about the potential impact of incoming President Donald Trump's economic policies, including tariffs and tax cuts, which some have speculated could fuel growth and reignite inflation.

Syrian caretaker government to hike public sector salaries by 400%

Majority of country lives below the poverty line

Riham Alkousaa
REUTERS

DAMASCUS – Syria's finance minister said on Sunday the government would hike salaries for many public sector employees by 400% next month after completing an administrative restructuring of ministries to boost efficiency and accountability.

The increase, estimated to cost 1.65 trillion Syrian pounds, or about \$127 million at current rates, will be financed by existing state resources plus a combination of regional aid, new investments, and efforts to unfreeze Syrian assets held abroad.

"(This is) the first step toward an emergency solution to the economic reality in the country," Mohammed Abazeed, the finance minister in Syria's

caretaker government, told Reuters, adding that this month's wages for public sector staff would be paid out this week.

These measures are part of a broader strategy by Syria's new caretaker government to stabilize the country's economy following 13 years of conflict and sanctions.

Salaries of Syria's public sector employees under toppled President Bashar Assad's regime were around \$25 a month, putting them below the poverty line, along with the majority of the country's population, Abazeed said.

The hike would follow a comprehensive evaluation of up to 1.3 million registered public sector employees to remove fictitious employees from the payroll and would affect those with sufficient expertise, academic qualifications, and the necessary skills for reconstruction.

Syria's state treasury is facing liquidity challenges emerging from a war. The

majority of money available in the central bank is Syrian currency, which has lost much of its value. However, the new government was promised assistance from regional and Arab countries, the minister said.

"The launch of investments in the country in the near future will also benefit the state treasury and allow us to finance this salary increase," he said, adding the central bank currently has sufficient funds to finance the next few months.

The government expects to retrieve up to \$400 million in frozen Syrian assets abroad, which could co-finance the initial government expenses.

Syria's caretaker government is also discussing exempting taxpayers, as much as possible, from penalties and interest and working on overhauling the tax system within the next three months to achieve tax justice for all taxpayers, with a first draft expected within four months.



A Palestinian man walks at the site of an Israeli strike on a house, amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas, in Gaza City on Sunday. DAWOOD ABU ALKAS/REUTERS

Hamas, Israel wrangle over talks as strikes intensify

Medics: More than 100 people die in Israeli attacks this weekend

Nidal al-Mughrabi

REUTERS

CAIRO – Israel and Hamas wrangled on Sunday over the details of a deal to halt fighting in the Gaza Strip and return hostages home, as Palestinian officials said intensified Israeli bombardments had killed more than 100 people over the weekend.

A Hamas official said the group had approved a list of 34 Israeli hostages to be returned as part of a deal that could eventually lead to a ceasefire. But Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office swiftly issued a statement saying Hamas had not provided a hostage list.

Later on Sunday, the Hamas official provided Reuters a copy of the list showing the names of 34 hostages it agreed to set free in any possible ceasefire deal with Israel.

A renewed push is underway to reach a ceasefire in the 15-month war between Israel and Hamas, and return Israeli hostages who were taken to Gaza, before U.S. President-elect Donald Trump takes office on Jan. 20.

The effort comes amid a surge in Israeli military action in the enclave. This weekend, Israeli airstrikes in Gaza killed 105 Palestinians, medics said. The Israeli military said it had killed dozens of Hamas militants.

The U.S. State Department said Israel must comply with international law and do "significantly more to ensure the pro-

tection of civilians." It added that it supports Israel's right to defend itself.

Israeli negotiators were dispatched on Friday to resume talks in Doha brokered by Qatari and Egyptian mediators, and U.S. President Joe Biden's administration, which is helping to mediate, has urged Hamas to agree to a deal.

Hamas said on Friday it was committed to reaching an agreement as soon as possible, but it was unclear how close the two sides were.

A Hamas official told Reuters any agreement to return Israeli hostages would hinge on a deal for Israel to withdraw from Gaza and a permanent ceasefire or end to the war.

"However, until now, the occupation continues to be obstinate over an agreement over the issues of the ceasefire and withdrawal, and has made no step forward," the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Netanyahu has consistently said the war will only end once Hamas is eradicated as a military and governing force.

Israel launched its assault on Gaza in response to an Oct. 7, 2023 attack by Hamas militants on communities in southern Israel, killing about 1,200 people and taking about 250 hostages, according to Israeli tallies.

Israel's military campaign has since leveled swathes of the enclave, driving most people from their homes, and has killed 45,805 Palestinians, according to the Gaza health ministry.

Fighting rages

Israeli military strikes continued throughout the Gaza Strip on Sunday, with an airstrike killing five people in a

house in the Nuseirat camp in central Gaza, Gaza health officials said, and another killing four in Jabalia in the north of the enclave.

Later in the day, an airstrike hit a police station in Khan Younis in southern Gaza, killing five people, medics said. It was not immediately clear if all the dead were police officers.

At nightfall, medics said an Israeli airstrike had killed three people in Bureij camp in central Gaza, bringing Sunday's death toll to 17.

The Israeli military said it had struck Hamas militants operating from the humanitarian area in Khan Younis, and an Islamic Jihad militant who it said had carried out attacks from the humanitarian area in Deir al-Balah.

In Gaza City's Sheikh Radwan neighborhood, relatives and neighbors rushed to the Zuhd family's house, which was struck by an Israeli airstrike late on Saturday, killing seven people, medics said.

The search continued on Sunday morning for four others believed to be trapped under the rubble.

Three men dug away debris with their bare hands to retrieve bodies and search for possible survivors.

The Israeli military said on Sunday its forces had attacked more than 100 targets across Gaza over the weekend, killing dozens of Hamas militants. It said it had also destroyed rocket launching sites that had been used to wage attacks on Israel in recent days.

Later on Sunday, it said it had killed last week in the Jabalia area an Islamic Jihad militant who had participated in the Oct. 7 attack on Israel.

Ethics

Continued from Page 1NN

meet their requirements for complete disclosure of their financial interests and arrangements."

Q. How does the financial disclosure process work with presidential nominees?

A: Normally, he said, nominees for top jobs fill out reports early to help the office "identify potential conflicts or steps the nominee might have to take if they are confirmed so all that information is available to the Senate and to the officials so they know what they are getting themselves into."

Q. What sort of deadlines are there? When do people have to make these disclosures?

A: He said nominees should submit a report "within five days of their nomination. ... Our goal is to help these incoming officials, help the Senate and do so as efficiently as possible."

He noted that "any member of the public can request a copy" of any financial disclosure report filed with the OGE. "The idea is the public, too, can help play a role in monitoring for conflicts of interest."

Q. What is the enforcement mechanism if there are conflicts of interest?

A: "It's not so much if a conflict comes up on the form itself, but whether ultimately any federal employees is engaged with work that then conflicts with

their financial interest."

"The conflict of interest law is a criminal law, so the ultimate recourse is prosecution by the Department of Justice. Our role is to actually help advise employees to avoid that situation ..."

"We will work with the agency ethics officials if we learn of a potential conflict of interest problem to make sure that gets addressed, ultimately we work with the Department of Justice as well if necessary."

Q: As the State Department ethics head, what lessons did you learn?

A: "Most employees, career and appointed, want to follow the law and want to act with integrity and they appreciate the help of ethics officials ..."

Q: In your Congressional testimony, you said you think the OGE can help in the "struggle against the growing cynicism and distrust that can undermine our democratic self government." Can you explain?

A: "We want to make sure employees ... don't act based on personal interests, especially financial interests and personal motivations ..."

"In practice the federal ethics rules may be more limited in their actual scope than people appreciate, so people's assumptions that there's a specific issue with compliance with federal ethics laws may not be well grounded."

Q. What are some examples of interests that are not substantial enough to raise red flags?

A: "The financial conflict of interest laws are ... pretty exact in terms of their

scope. Either you have enough stock to pose a conflict or you don't."

Q. Can ethics be taught? For people coming from the business side, interactions are often based around "How can I use this to advantage me or my company," on purpose.

A: "I hope so because there are lot of ethics training requirements," he said, laughing.

He agreed officials coming from the private sector are used to "networking and 'What can you do to benefit someone so they can in turn benefit you...'. It is a challenge to make sure those officials and new employees understand that the expectations within government are a little bit different ..."

Q. What happens if the DOJ does not take ethics laws seriously? Where does that leave you?

A: "Criminal prosecution is one extreme, but there is enforcement at the agency level in terms of discipline."

Q. The president can grant a waiver exempting someone from conflict of interest laws, correct? Is that something the OGE can push back on, or advise against?

A: "The president in some cases and agency heads or officials ... can grant exemptions" but must consult with the OGE.

He said exemptions can be granted when "the potential conflict of interest isn't viewed as that significant. Ultimately OGE needs to know when a waiver is issued. They can be made public."

WSJ: More firms compromised by Chinese hack of US telecoms

REUTERS

WASHINGTON – A Chinese hack compromised even more U.S. telecoms than previously known, including Charter Communications, Consolidated Communications and Windstream, the Wall Street Journal reported late on Saturday, citing people familiar with the matter.

Hackers also exploited unpatched network devices from security vendor Fortinet and compromised large network routers from Cisco Systems, the newspaper reported.

In addition to deep intrusions into AT&T and Verizon, hackers pierced other networks belonging to Lumen Technologies and T-Mobile, according to the report.

China denied engaging in such actions and accused the United States of peddling disinformation.

There is growing concern about the size and scope of the reported Chinese hacking into U.S. telecommunications networks and questions about when companies and the government will be able to assure Americans about the issue.

There is growing concern about the size and scope of the reported Chinese hacking into U.S. telecommunications networks and questions about when companies and the government will be able to assure Americans.

The report added that U.S. national security adviser Jake Sullivan told telecommunications and technology executives at a secret White House meeting in the fall of 2023 that Chinese hackers had gained the ability to shut down dozens of U.S. ports, power grids and other infrastructure targets at will.

The Chinese-linked Salt Typhoon cyberespionage operation targeted AT&T and Verizon's systems, but the wireless carriers' U.S. networks are now secure as they work with law enforcement and government officials, the companies said last week in their first acknowledgment of the attacks.

Lumen said it no longer sees evidence of the attackers in its network and that no customer data was accessed. T-Mobile said it stopped recent attempts to infiltrate its systems from advancing and protected sensitive customer information from being accessed, according to the Journal.

Verizon told the newspaper that a small number of high-profile customers in government and politics were specifically targeted by a threat actor and that those people had been notified.

Vandana Venkatesh, chief legal officer at Verizon, told the newspaper that "Verizon has contained the activities associated with this particular incident."

Cisco and Fortinet declined to comment to the newspaper.

Targets of Salt Typhoon have previously reportedly included officials connected to Kamala Harris and Donald Trump's presidential campaigns.

Certification

Continued from Page 1NN

legislative priorities. Republicans won control of both the chambers in November's election.

Other leaders stressed they were not contemplating a weather delay.

"No change to the schedule," said Lauren Fine, communications director for Republican House Majority Leader Steve Scalise.

The certification process, usually a formality, was upended four years ago when supporters of Trump violently stormed the U.S. Capitol in a bid to halt the transfer of power to Democrat Joe Biden, who won the 2020 election.

Trump has continued to falsely claim his 2020 defeat was the result of widespread fraud. Biden and the Democrats say they will honor the 2024 election results and proceed with certification.



Adrien Brody and Georgina Chapman attend the 82nd Golden Globe Awards in Beverly Hills, Calif. on Sunday. DANIEL COLE/REUTERS



Cynthia Erivo and Ariana Grande attend the 82nd Golden Globe Awards in Beverly Hills, Calif. on Sunday. DANIEL COLE/REUTERS

GOLDEN GLOBES KICK OFF NEW YEAR

Ariana Grande, Angelina Jolie, Selena Gomez among nominees

Lisa Richwine
REUTERS

BEVERLY HILLS — Ariana Grande, Adrien Brody, Angelina Jolie and other Hollywood stars stepped out in their red-carpet best at the Golden Globes on Sunday, the first major awards ceremony in a year without a clear frontrunner for the top movie accolades.

"Wicked" star Grande arrived in a yellow vintage Givenchy gown with a beaded bodice that she said was a tribute to the yellow brick road leading to Oz in the movie musical.

"It's so exciting to be here because I'm such a fan of every single person I bump into," Grande said of the star-studded crowd in Beverly Hills. "To be here is just the most unexpected delightful surprise of my life."

Also on the carpet, "The Brutalist" star and nominee Brody sported a large bejeweled brooch on his dark tuxedo. His co-star, Felicity Jones, shined in a sparkly silver sleeveless gown.

Netflix's Spanish-language musical thriller "Emilia Perez" and "The Brutalist," a 3½-hour post-World War II drama that includes an intermission, lead the movies competing for Globe trophies.

Others include box office smash "Wicked," adapted from the Broadway play about the witches in "The Wizard of Oz," and papal selection story "Conclave."

Restaurant tale "The Bear" and mystery comedy "Only Murders in the Building" will compete for TV honors.

The Globes aired live on CBS and the Paramount+ streaming service starting at 8 p.m. Eastern on Sunday.

Stand-up comedian Nikki Glaser hosted the champagne-fueled festivities for the first time.

Glaser, who hosted a roast of football legend Tom Brady last year, said she planned to celebrate the A-list nominees rather than poke fun at them as some previous hosts have.

"I want people who were nominated to feel proud of themselves. I don't want them to feel under attack," Glaser said in an interview.

The presenter lineup featured big-name celebrities including Dwayne Johnson, Elton John, Andrew Garfield and Awkwafina.

Winning a Globe can shine a spotlight on movies and performances in the run-up to the Academy Awards in March. So far, awards pundits say, there is no clear favorite for the coveted best picture prize at



Daniel Craig attends the 82nd Golden Globe Awards in Beverly Hills, Calif. on Sunday. DANIEL COLE/REUTERS

the Oscars.

Unlike the Oscars, the Globes separate films into two categories. "Conclave" and "The Brutalist" are considered strong entries in best film drama, while "Wicked" and "Emilia Perez" are the leading contenders for best movie musical or comedy.

Globe honorees are chosen by 334 entertainment journalists from 85 countries, compared with roughly 9,000 voters who select the Academy Awards. The Globes voting body has been expanded in recent years and organizers instituted reforms after being criticized for ethical lapses and a lack of diversity.

Timothee Chalamet was in contention for best film drama actor for playing musician Bob Dylan in "A Complete Unknown." His competition included Brody, who portrays a Holocaust survivor and architect chasing the American dream in "The Brutalist."

Selena Gomez was a double nominee for her supporting role in "Emilia Perez," the story of a Mexican drug lord who transitions to a woman, and for lead comedy actress as a podcaster on TV series "Only Murders in the Building."

Other acting nominees included Angelina Jolie for her portrayal of opera star Maria Callas in "Maria," Nicole Kidman as a corporate executive having an affair with an intern in "Babygirl," Zendaya as a tennis coach in "Challengers" and Ariana Grande as a student of sorcery in "Wicked."

Among the men, Daniel Craig was nominated for "Queer" and Denzel Washington for "Gladiator II."



Zendaya at the 82nd Annual Golden Globe Awards at the Beverly Hilton Hotel in Beverly Hills, Calif. on Sunday. DAN MACMEDAN/USA TODAY



Zahara Jolie and Angelina Jolie attend the 82nd Annual Golden Globe Awards at The Beverly Hilton on Sunday in Beverly Hills, Calif.

AMY SUSSMAN/GETTY IMAGES



French-U.S. actor Timothee Chalamet arrives for the 82nd annual Golden Globe Awards at the Beverly Hilton hotel in Beverly Hills, Calif., on Sunday. ETIENNE LAURENT/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

SPORTS

EXTRA

NFL



Lions running back Jahmyr Gibbs gets tackled for a loss by Vikings linebacker Jonathan Greenard (58) in the first quarter Sunday night at Ford Field. LON HORWEDEL/IMAGN IMAGES

LIONS WRAP UP NFC'S NO. 1 SEED

The Detroit Lions made history in a night to remember at Ford Field. Jahmyr Gibbs scored four touchdowns as the Lions busted through the Minnesota Vikings, 31-9, on Sunday night in perhaps their most complete game of the season at the perfect time in Week 18. The Lions went a franchise-best 15-2 in the regular season and secured the NFC's No. 1 seed for the first time. **ROUNDUP, PAGE 2NS**

GOLF PGA TOUR

Matsuyama breaks scoring record, wins The Sentry

Field Level Media

Japan's Hideki Matsuyama knew he had to keep making birdies during the final round of The Sentry.

He ended up making history, too.

Matsuyama couldn't be caught while shooting an 8-under-par 65 to win The Sentry, the PGA Tour's season opener, on Sunday at The Plantation Course in Kapalua, Hawaii.

Matsuyama finished at 35-under 257, the lowest 72-hole score to par in PGA Tour history. It was good for a three-stroke victory over runner-up Collin Morikawa, who shot 67.

Matsuyama birdied the final hole, a par-5, to reach 35 under.

"That last putt, it felt like if I make it, then it's going to be the record," Matsuyama said. "So I'm so happy that it went in."

It marked Matsuyama's 11th career victory on the tour and follows two tournament titles last year.

Matsuyama holed out for eagle on the par-4 third hole with the ball bouncing a couple of times before landing in the cup as his lead grew to three strokes. The margin was four shots going to the back nine even after Matsuyama's bogey on the par-4 seventh marked just his second bogey of the tournament.

Morikawa's birdie on the 15th hole closed the gap to two shots. Matsuyama responded with a birdie on the next hole.

"He just never let up," Morikawa said. "Then you get to the third hole and the guy holes it. I just knew I had to be on top of everything, and just kind of let a few slip on that front nine."

Matsuyama, who turns 33 next month, took the lead during Friday's second round and kept up his pace of birdies. Morikawa had matched Matsuyama's scores Friday and Saturday (65 and 62), entering the final round trailing



Hideki Matsuyama lines up his putt on the 17th hole during the final round of The Sentry at the Plantation Course at Kapalua. KYLE TERADA/IMAGN IMAGES

NFL

Patriots fire coach after one season

Michael Middlehurst-Schwartz
USA TODAY

After enjoying one of the longest periods of coaching stability under Bill Belichick, the New England Patriots are going the one-and-done route.



The Patriots on Sunday fired coach Jerod Mayo after just one season, the team announced, marking a stunning about-face from owner Robert Kraft on the figure he appointed to be Belichick's successor.

Kraft said the decision to fire Mayo was "one of the hardest decisions I have ever made."

"Unfortunately, the trajectory of our team's performance throughout the season did not ascend as I had hoped," Kraft said in a statement.

New England stumbled to a 4-13 finish in Mayo's debut as a head coach, though the team won its season finale against the Buffalo Bills. But after Belichick, who won six Super Bowls in 24 years leading the franchise, was pushed out after a 4-13 campaign, many expected Mayo would receive more time to engineer a turnaround.

Instead, New England is once again looking for another fresh start.

Mayo's run began auspiciously with a surprising 16-10 win over the Cincinnati Bengals in the season opener. But the Patriots would lose their next six games and finish the year on a seven-game skid. During the 40-7 loss to the Los Angeles Chargers in Week 17, "fire Mayo" chants broke out at Gillette Stadium. Mayo also came under fire for calling New England "a soft football team across the board" following a 32-16 loss to the Jacksonville Jaguars in London in Week 7. The coach attempted to walk back his remark, but Belichick and others criticized him for his characterization of his players and their performance.

Despite the unrest around the mounting losses, Mayo said in the week prior to the regular-season finale against the Bills that he didn't have cause for concern regarding his standing. "I'm always in constant communication with ownership," Mayo said in a news conference. "I feel like we're still on the same page."

The Patriots are projected to have more than \$130 million in salary cap space - more than any other team - for 2025 as well as the No. 4 overall pick in this year's NFL draft.

SUBSCRIBER-EXCLUSIVE SECTION

NFL**ROUNDUP**

Lions pummel Vikings, win NFC North

Field Level Media

Jahmyr Gibbs had 170 yards from scrimmage and four touchdowns and the host Detroit Lions pulled away for a 31-9 win over the Minnesota Vikings on Sunday night to secure the No. 1 seed in the NFC playoffs for the first time in franchise history.

Jared Goff completed 27 of 33 passes for 231 yards, one touchdown and two interceptions for Detroit (15-2). Gibbs rushed for 139 yards and three touchdowns and caught five passes for 31 yards and one score.

Sam Darnold completed 18 of 41 passes for 166 yards for Minnesota (14-3), which was held without a touchdown. The Vikings' nine-game winning streak ended.

The Lions clinched the NFC North title for the second year in a row. They will have a bye next week and have secured home-field advantage throughout the conference playoffs.

The Vikings will enter the postseason as a wild-card team and the No. 5 seed in the NFC. They will travel to Inglewood, Calif., to face the fourth-seeded Los Angeles Rams on Jan. 13.

Gibbs gave the Lions the upper hand with three straight touchdowns in the second half.

Panthers 34, Falcons 28, OT

ATLANTA – Miles Sanders rushed for the game-winning 1-yard touchdown in overtime and the visiting Carolina Panthers beat the Falcons, eliminating Atlanta from playoff contention.

Bryce Young completed 25 of 34 passes for 251 yards and three touchdowns, adding two more scores on the ground, as Carolina (5-12) scored a season-high 44 points.

Michael Penix Jr. threw for 312 yards, two touchdowns and an interception for the Falcons (8-9), who needed a win paired with a Tampa Bay loss to New Orleans in order to win the division.

Commanders 23, Cowboys 19

Marcus Mariota's 3-yard touchdown pass to Terry McLaurin with three seconds left gave the Washington Commanders a win over the Dallas Cowboys in Arlington, Texas.

The Commanders (12-5) nailed down the No. 6 seed in the NFC playoffs and won 12 games for the first time since 1991. Dallas (7-10) closed its season by losing four of its last five games.

Bears 24, Packers 22

Cairo Santos drilled a 51-yard field goal on the final play of the season finale as the Chicago Bears broke a 10-game losing streak by edging the host Green Bay Packers.

The Bears' win also snapped the longest active winning streak by a team over one opponent. Chicago had lost 11 in a row to Green Bay.

Caleb Williams moved the Bears (5-12) 47 yards to set up Santos' heroics after Brandon McManus' third field goal, a 55-yarder, had given Green Bay (11-6) a 22-21 lead with 54 seconds remaining.

Colts 26, Jaguars 23, OT

Matt Guy kicked four field goals, including a 38-yard field goal in overtime, to help the Indianapolis Colts record a victory over the visiting Jacksonville Jaguars.

Jonathan Taylor rushed for 177 yards and one touchdown on 34 carries for the Colts (8-9). Joe Flacco completed 23 of 40 passes for 264 yards and one touchdown and Alec Pierce had the scoring reception.

Mac Jones was 20-of-32 passing for 225 yards, one touchdown and one interception for the Jaguars (4-13).

Patriots 23, Bills 16

Joe Milton III threw for one touchdown and rushed for another in his NFL debut to guide the New England Patriots over the Buffalo Bills in Foxborough, Mass.

New England (4-13) would have secured the No. 1 overall pick in the 2025 draft had it lost.

Instead, the Patriots got an efficient performance from Milton, who hit on 22 of 29 passes for 241 yards. He got off to a roaring start, rattling off 11 straight completions to begin his professional career.

Eagles 20, Giants 13

Tanner McKee threw two touchdown



Vikings safety Josh Metellus (44) tips a pass by Lions quarterback Jared Goff (16), which was intercepted by Vikings linebacker Ivan Pace Jr. DAVID REGINEK/IMAGN IMAGES



Broncos quarterback Bo Nix scrambles in the second quarter against the Chiefs at Empower Field at Mile High. RON CHENOY/IMAGN IMAGES

passes in his first NFL start and the Philadelphia Eagles matched a franchise record for wins with a victory over the visiting New York Giants.

The Eagles (14-3), who posted the same record two years ago, were already locked in as the No. 2 seed in the NFC and did not play most of their starters. They will host the Green Bay Packers in a wild-card game next weekend.

McKee threw for 269 yards on 27-of-41 passing. Jahan Dotson caught seven passes for 94 yards.

Buccaneers 27, Saints 19

Baker Mayfield threw two touchdown passes and the host Tampa Bay Buccaneers came from behind to defeat the New Orleans Saints and win their fourth consecutive NFC South title.

In addition to securing a playoff spot, Buccaneers wide receiver Mike Evans reached 1,000 yards receiving for the 11th consecutive season to tie Jerry Rice's NFL record, hitting the mark on the final play of the regular season.

Tampa won for the sixth time in seven games and will host a playoff game next weekend.

Texans 23, Titans 14

C.J. Stroud threw a touchdown pass and Damien Pierce rushed for 176 yards and another score as the Houston Tex-

ans tuned up for the playoffs with a win over the Tennessee Titans in Nashville.

With their loss and the New England Patriots' victory over the Buffalo Bills on Sunday, the Titans hold the No. 1 pick in the 2025 NFL Draft.

Stroud hit all six of his passes for 50 yards on the game's first possession, finding Nico Collins for a 2-yard strike at the 7:43 mark.

Cardinals 47, 49ers 24

Kyler Murray tied a career high with four touchdown passes and did not throw an interception to lead the Arizona Cardinals to a season sweep of the San Francisco 49ers at Glendale, Ariz.

Murray was 25 of 35 for 242 yards for Arizona, which concluded its season 8-9.

San Francisco (6-11) played without starting quarterback Brock Purdy (elbow) and receiver Deebo Samuel (ribs and wrist).

Broncos 38, Chiefs 0

Bo Nix's career day punched the Denver Broncos' ticket to the playoffs with a rout of the Kansas City Chiefs.

It is the first time since the 2015 season that the Broncos have reached the postseason.

Nix completed his first 18 passes and was 26 of 29 for the game, an 89.7 com-

pletion percentage that set a new Broncos' single-game record. Nix set a career high with 321 yards and also had four touchdown passes.

Seahawks 30, Rams 25

Geno Smith threw four touchdown passes, including a 16-yarder to Noah Fant with 3:19 remaining, as the Seattle Seahawks completed their season with a victory against the NFC West champion Los Angeles Rams in Inglewood, Calif. The Seahawks (10-7) finished with the same record as the Rams (10-7), but the division was decided last weekend because Los Angeles had the edge in the strength-of-victory tiebreaker. The Rams will get the No. 4 seed in the NFC playoffs.

Smith completed 20 of 27 passes for 223 yards. Zach Charbonnet and Kenny McIntosh combined for 108 yards rushing, with Fant and fellow tight end AJ Barner each making five receptions and scoring once.

Chargers 34, Raiders 20

Quentin Johnston hauled in a career-high 13 receptions for 186 yards, leading the Los Angeles Chargers over the host Las Vegas Raiders.

Justin Herbert threw for 346 yards and two touchdowns, completing 28 of 36 passes en route to a 125.2 passer rating. Ladd McConkey chipped in 95 yards on five catches, while J.K. Dobbins added 63 rushing yards on 18 carries to finish the regular season with a career-high 905 rushing yards.

The Chargers clinched the fifth seed in the AFC playoff picture with the win, meaning they'll head to Houston to face the Texans in the wild-card round next weekend.

Jets 32, Dolphins 20

In what might have been the final game of his Hall of Fame career, Aaron Rodgers threw a season-high four touchdown passes and reached a career milestone while leading the host New York Jets over the Miami Dolphins in East Rutherford, N.J.

Rodgers completed 23 of 36 passes for 274 yards, threw an interception and finished with a 112.5 passer rating as the Jets (5-12) played spoiler against their longtime AFC East rivals. Even before the time expired, Miami (8-9) was eliminated from playoff contention once the Denver Broncos beat the Kansas Chiefs to clinch the AFC's final wild-card berth. Rodgers' first touchdown pass on Sunday was the 500th of his career. He tossed a 5-yarder to Tyler Conklin with 7:57 left in the second quarter to put the Jets ahead 7-6.

NFL

NOTEBOOK

Titans clinch No. 1 pick in draft

Wire Reports

The Tennessee Titans wore Houston Oilers throwback uniforms for their season finale against the Texans on Sunday.

After a sixth straight defeat to end the season, the Titans are on the clock for the first time since the Oilers days.

Tennessee is one of three teams to finish the season at 3-14, joined by the Cleveland Browns and New York Giants. The Titans got the nod in the tiebreaker by posting their record against the weakest strength of schedule out of that trio (.521).

The franchise will pick first overall for the first time since the Oilers drafted

running back Earl Campbell in 1978. The only other time they went first overall was 1973, when the Oilers took defensive end John Matuszak.

Cleveland will pick second overall and New York will go third. All three teams could be in the market for a new franchise quarterback.

Rounding out the top five are the New England Patriots and Jacksonville Jaguars, who are 4-13. The Patriots could have secured the top pick with a loss to the Buffalo Bills on Sunday because their strength of schedule was weaker than Tennessee's.

Instead, they upset playoff-bound Buffalo 23-16.

Evans equals Rice's record

Tampa Bay wide receiver Mike Evans booked his 11th consecutive season with 1,000 or more receiving yards on Sunday, equaling Hall of Famer Jerry Rice's record, as the Buccaneers beat the New Orleans Saints 27-19 to book their spot in the postseason. With Tampa Bay up by a score and just 36 seconds on the clock, quarterback Baker Mayfield tossed him a 9-yard pass to ensure Evans — who was five yards short of the 1,000 mark — would get over the line.

Evans made a graceful catch to send the home crowd and his teammates into a frenzy, as the 31-year-old extended his own career-opening record with 1,000

or more receiving yards in all of his 11 seasons in the league.

"I'm happy that they had me go out there and get that because it's been hard to do for 11 straight years and to be tied with one of the — if not the greatest — receiver of all time, means a lot to me," Evans told reporters.

Throwing from well behind the 50-yard-line, Mayfield acknowledged that the play was a calculated risk, giving the Saints an opening if they were able to force a turnover when he could have taken a knee to end the contest.

It capped a terrific reversal of fortune for Tampa Bay, who won all but one of its final seven games to book a spot in the playoffs for the fifth straight time.

Detroit 31, Minnesota 9

Det-Jahmyr Gibbs 25 yd run (Jake Bates kick), 1:43.

Second Quarter

Min-Will Reichard 25 yd FG, 6:55.

Min-Will Reichard 31 yd FG, 0:20.

Det-Jake Bates 48 yd FG, 0:00.

Third Quarter

Min-Will Reichard 51 yd FG, 9:55.

Det-Jahmyr Gibbs 10 yd pass from Jared Goff (Jake Bates kick), 2:30.

Fourth Quarter

Det-Jahmyr Gibbs 13 yd run (Jake Bates kick), 13:06.

Det-Jahmyr Gibbs 4 yd run (Jake Bates kick), 5:14.

A-64,774

Min Det

First downs 14 24

Total Net Yards 262 394

Rushes-yards 19-120 31-178

Passing 142 216

Punt Returns 2-12 3-23

Kickoff Returns 0-0 0-0

Interceptions Ret. 2-6 0-0

Comp-Att-Int 18-41-0 27-33-2

Sacked-Yards Lost 2-24 2-15

Punts 3-51.7 2-51.0

Fumbles-Lost 0-0 0-0

Penalties-Yards 6-30 8-49

Time of Possession 23:48 36:12

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

RUSHING-Minnesota, Akers 6-65, Jones Sr. 10-45,

Darnold 3-10, Detroit, Gibbs 23-139, Reynolds 8-39,

PASSING-Minnesota, Darnold 18-41-0-166, Detroit,

Goff 27-33-2-231.

RECEIVING-Minnesota, Jones Sr. 5-30, Jefferson

3-54, Nailor 3-53, Oliver 2-16, Hockenson 2-9, Akers

2-4, Addison 1-0, Detroit, LaPorta 7-63, St. Brown

6-77, Williams 6-34, Gibbs 5-31, Patrick 2-15,

Raymond 1-11.

MISSING FIELD GOALS-Reichard 51.

Carolina 44, Atlanta 38, OT

Carolina 3 14 14 7 6 - 44

Atlanta 3 21 0 14 0 - 38

First Quarter

Atl-Riley Patterson 31 yd FG, 11:08.

Car-Eddy Pineiro 35 yd FG, 7:03.

Second Quarter

Car-Bryce Young 2 yd run (Eddy Pineiro kick),

10:47.

Atl-Michael Penix Jr. 5 yd run (Riley Patterson

kick), 5:27.

Car-Miles Sanders 33 yd pass from Bryce Young

(Eddy Pineiro kick), 2:48.

Atl-Brian Robinson 3 yd run (Riley Patterson kick),

1:34.

Atl-Drake London 20 yd pass from Michael Penix

Jr. (Riley Patterson kick), 0:03.

Third Quarter

Car-Tommy Tremble 12 yd pass from Bryce Young

(Eddy Pineiro kick), 10:43.

Car-David Moore 9 yd pass from Bryce Young

(Eddy Pineiro kick), 1:02.

Fourth Quarter

Atl-Drake London 21 yd pass from Michael Penix Jr.

(Riley Patterson kick), 9:50.

Car-Bryce Young 10 yd run (Eddy Pineiro kick),

4:01.

Atl-Brian Robinson 4 yd run (Riley Patterson kick),

0:46.

OT

Car-Miles Sanders 1 yd run, 3:14.

Car Atl

First downs 25 30

Total Net Yards 425 537

Rushes-yards 30-155 38-227

Passing 270 308

Punt Returns 0-0 1-9

Kickoff Returns 0-0 4-96

Interceptions Ret. 1-19 0-0

Comp-Att-Int 26-35-0 21-38-1

Sacked-Yards Lost 0-0 1-2

Punts 3-51.7 0-

Fumbles-Lost 1-0 0-0

Penalties-Yards 2-30 7-55

Time of Possession 37:19 32:41

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

RUSHING-Carolina, Sanders 17-66, Blackshear

4-47, Young 5-24, Boone 4-18, Atlanta, Robinson

18-10, Allgeier 5-2, Penix Jr. 1-5

PASSING-Carolina, Young 25-34-0-251, Coker

1-0-19, Atlanta, Penix Jr. 21-38-1-32.

RECEIVING-Carolina, Coker 7-62, Thielen 5-44,

Sanders 3-50, Sanders 3-35, Legette 3-30, Tremble

2-30, Franklin 1-12, Moore 1-9, Boone 1-(minus 2).

Atlanta, London 10-187, McCloud III 4-66, Allgeier

2-17, Pitts 2-15, Robinson 2-3, Hodge 1-24.

MISSING FIELD GOALS-Patterson 52.

Washington 23, Dallas 19

Washington 0 3 7 13 - 23

Dallas 3 3 3 10 - 19

First Quarter

Dal-Brandon Aubrey 34 yd FG, 8:20.

Second Quarter

Dal-Brandon Aubrey 41 yd FG, 12:41.

Was-Zane Gonzalez 47 yd FG, 4:40.

Third Quarter

Dal-Brandon Aubrey 36 yd FG, 8:52.

Was-Zach Ertz 5 yd pass from Marcus Mariota

(Zane Gonzalez kick), 5:07.

Fourth Quarter

Dal-Brandon Aubrey 22 yd FG, 13:33.

Was-Marcus Mariota 5 yd run (Terry McLaurin

failed 2pt Pass from Marcus Mariota), 11:18.

Dal-Rico Dowdle 2 yd run (Brandon Aubrey kick),

7:02.

Was-Terry McLaurin 5 yd pass from Marcus

Mariota (Zane Gonzalez kick), 0:03.

Was Dal

First downs 18 25

Total Net Yards 269 377

Rushes-yards 18-113 39-150

Passing 113 210

Punt Returns 3-23 1-2

Kickoff Returns 0-0 1-30

Interceptions Ret. 0-0 0-0

Comp-Att-Int 21-31-0 20-34-0

Sacked-Yards Lost 6-43 2-17

Punts 5-47-0 4-49-5

Fumbles-Lost 1-1 0-0

Penalties-Yards 5-55 11-68

Time of Possession 22:57 37:03

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

RUSHING-Washington, Mariota 5-56, Daniels 4-27,

Ekeler 3-12, Robinson Jr. 5-10, Brown 1-8, Dallas,

Dowdle 22-72, Vaughn 6-37, Lance 6-26, Lueke

3-15, Turpin 1-5, Cooks 1-(minus 5).

PASSING-Washington, Mariota 15-18-0-161,

Daniels 6-12-0-38, Brown 0-1-0-0, Dallas, Lance

20-34-0-244.

RECEIVING-Washington, McLaurin 8-62, Ertz 5-44,

Brown 3-16, Zacheaus 2-51, Ekeler 2-20, Robinson

NBA ROUNDUP



Thunder guard Shai Gilgeous-Alexander shoots over Celtics guard Jaylen Brown (7) during the fourth quarter at Paycom Center. ALONZO ADAMS/IMAGN IMAGES

Thunder rally past Celtics for 15th straight win

Field Level Media

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 33 points to lead the Oklahoma City Thunder to a 105-92 home win over the Boston Celtics on Sunday.

The Thunder extended their winning streak to a franchise-record 15. Oklahoma City's winning streak is tied for the longest this season with Cleveland, which won 15 consecutive games to start the season.

Aaron Wiggins, the star of Oklahoma City's fourth-quarter comeback against the Knicks on Friday, scored 15 points off the bench. Luguentz Dort had 14, Cason Wallace added 13 and Jalen Williams put up 10.

Jayson Tatum had 26 points and 10 rebounds for Boston, whose three-game winning streak was snapped. Jaylen Brown added 21 points — all in the first half. Brown was 0 for 7 from the floor after halftime. Kristaps Porzingis added 19 points and nine boards.

Pelicans 110, Wizards 98

CJ McCollum scored a team-high 25 points to help lead the visiting New Orleans Pelicans to a win over the Washington Wizards. Trey Murphy III added 22 points for the Pelicans, who won their second game over Washington in three days. Yves Missi had 16 points while Dejounte Murray collected 14 points, 12 assists and 10 rebounds. Herbert Jones chipped in 11 points in the win. Kyle Kuzma led Washington with 28 points, followed by Alexandre Sarr's 18 points and 11 rebounds. Jared Butler scored 17 off the bench, while Carlton Carrington had 16 for Washington, which dropped its fourth game in five tries.

Cavaliers 115, Hornets 105

Darius Garland scored 25 points and Jarrett Allen posted a double-double as the Cleveland Cavaliers won their 10th straight game with a victory over the visiting Charlotte Hornets.

Allen paired 19 points on 9-of-10 shooting with 11 rebounds for Cleveland, which also got 19 points from Donovan Mitchell and 17 from Evan Mobley. Georges Niang chipped in 10 points off the bench as the Cavaliers continued to roll after completing a 4-0 road trip.

Even with its top two offensive players, LaMelo Ball and Brandon Miller, back in action, Charlotte was pummeled en route to its 10th straight loss. Ball and Miller finished with 24 points apiece in their first games since Dec. 26.

Jazz 105, Magic 92

Brice Sensabaugh scored 27 points off the bench as the short-handed Utah Jazz earned their second straight victory following a five-game losing streak, beating the host Orlando Magic.

One night after scoring a career-high 34 points in a 136-100 win over the Miami Heat, Sensabaugh went 11-for-19 from the field and 5-for-6 from beyond the arc against the Magic.

Collin Sexton added 20 points for Utah, which earned its ninth win this season. Kyle Filipowski, Johnny Juzang and Svi Mykhailiuk each scored 12 points, and Walker Kessler recorded 10 points and matched his season high with 17 rebounds.

Jett Howard led Orlando with a career-high 21 points off the bench. Wendell Carter Jr. scored 15 points, Cole Anthony added 12, Trevelin Queen chipped in 11 and Goga Bitadze had nine points

and 11 rebounds.

Rockets 119, Lakers 115

Jalen Green scored a game-high 33 points, Amen Thompson posted a double-double in his return from suspension and the Houston Rockets held on for a victory over the Los Angeles Lakers.

Anthony Davis totaled 30 points, 13 rebounds and five blocks while LeBron James (21 points, 13 rebounds) and Austin Reaves (21 points, 10 assists) also posted double-doubles. James added nine assists.

Fred VanVleet finished with 15 points and three 3-pointers. Steven Adams added eight points and nine rebounds off the Houston bench.

Kings 129, Warriors 99

Malik Monk and Domantas Sabonis each posted a double-double for the Sacramento Kings, who rode a dominant first half to a win over the Golden State Warriors in San Francisco.

Sabonis finished the game with 22 points, a team-high 13 rebounds and seven assists for Sacramento, which faced the Warriors for the first time since winning a Western Conference play-in game in April.

Taking over the primary ball-handling chores in the absence of Fox, Monk paced the Kings with 26 points to complement his game-high 12 assists and four steals.

Kevin Huerter (16), Devin Carter (13), DeMar DeRozan (12), Keegan Murray (11) and Keon Ellis (11) also scored in double figures for Sacramento, which emptied its bench ahead of Monday's visit from Miami to conclude a back-to-back.

Sacramento 129, Golden State 99

SACRAMENTO (129)

DeRozan 5-14 2-2 12, Murray 4-11 0-0 11, Sabonis 10-13 1-2 22, Ellis 3-7 4-4 11, Monk 9-14 3-3 26, Lyles 1-3 4-4 7, Carter 4-11 3-4 13, Huerter 5-7 2-2 16, Len 1-1 0-0 2, McLaughlin 0-2 0-0 0, McDermott 2-2 0-0 6, Robinson 1-2 1-1 3, Totals 45-87 20-22 129.

GOLDEN STATE (99)

Green 4-8 0-0 10, Wiggins 7-13 3-4 18, Jackson-Davis 0-3 0-0 0, Curry 8-12 6-6 26, Schroder 1-7 1-2 3, Moody 5-10 0-0 13, Waters III 2-5 0-0 5, Hield 3-7 0-0 7, Anderson 1-2 0-0 2, Looney 4-7 1-2 9, Spencer 1-4 2-4 4, Santos 1-3 0-0 2, Totals 37-81 13-18 99.

SAC 119, L.A. Lakers 115

L.A. LAKERS (115)

Hachimura 5-9 0-2 13, James 8-16 1-2 21, Davis 10-18 8-8 30, Christie 4-8 4-4 14, Reaves 6-13 6-7 21, Finney-Smith 5-9 1-1 13, Knecht 0-3 0-0 0, Hayes 0-2 2-2 2, Milton 0-0 1-2 1, Reddish 0-0 0-0 0, Totals 38-78 23-28 115.

HOUSTON (119)

Brooks 2-8 0-0 5, Thompson 11-19 1-4 23, Sengun 6-14 2-4 14, Green 12-24 4-4 33, VanVleet 5-11 2-3 15, Adams 3-4 2-4 8, Whitmore 3-8 0-0 8, Tate 2-3 0-0 6, Holiday 3-8 0-0 7, Totals 47-99 11-19 119.

LAL 115, HOI 119

LAL 22 27 40 26 - 115
HOI 36 31 24 28 - 119

3-Point Goals: L.A. Lakers 16-36 (James 4-7, Reaves 3-6, Hachimura 3-6, Davis 2-4, Christie 2-5, Finney-Smith 2-6, Knecht 0-2), Houston 14-40 (Green 5-12, VanVleet 3-8, Tate 2-3, Whitmore 2-5, Holiday 1-3, Brooks 1-4, Sengun 0-2, Thompson 0-3). Fouled Out: None. Rebounds: L.A. Lakers 39 (Davis, James 13), Houston 49 (Thompson 16). Assists: L.A. Lakers 26 (Reaves 10), Houston 19 (Green, Sengun 4). Total Fouls: L.A. Lakers 21, Houston 22. A: 18,055 (18,023)

Utah 105, Orlando 92

UTH (105)

Juzang 3-5 4-4 12, Potter 1-1 1-1, Kessler 4-6 2-2 10, Collier 1-8 0-2, Sexton 6-18 4-4 22, Filipowski 6-8 0-12, Sensabaugh 11-19 0-0 27, Mykhailiuk 4-9 3-3 12, Mills 0-2 0-0 0, Ebanks 3-4 1-2 7, Totals 39-82 16-18 105.

ORLANDO (92)

Houston 3-10 0-0 9, da Silva 3-11 0-0 6, Bitadze 4-9 0-4 9, Anthony 5-14 2-2 13, Caldwell-Pope 1-8 0-0 2, Queen 3-10 3-4 11, Howard 7-16 3-3 21, Carter Jr. 6-10 2-2 15, Joseph 2-5 0-5 0, Isaac 1-5 0-0 2, Totals 35-98 8-13 92.

Utah 105, Orlando 92

UTH 22 21 28 34 - 105
ORL 25 18 19 30 - 92

3-Point Goals: Utah 11-32 (Sensabaugh 5-6, Sexton 3-8, Juzang 2-4, Mykhailiuk 1-6, Potter 0-4, da Silva 0-4), Houston 14-47 (Howard 4-10, Houston 3-10, Anthony 2-4, Queen 2-5, Bitadze 1-2, Joseph 1-3, Carter Jr. 1-3, Isaac 0-2, Caldwell-Pope 0-4, da Silva 0-4). Fouled Out: None. Rebounds: Utah 50 (Kessler 17), Orlando 43 (Bitadze 11). Assists: Utah 21 (Collier 6), Orlando 25 (Queen 6). Total Fouls: Utah 19, Orlando 21. A: 19,198 (18,500)

Cleveland 115, Charlotte 105

CHARLOTTE (105)

Bridges 5-14 0-0 11, Green 0-4 0-0 0, Williams 4-7 3-3 11, Ball 7-20 7-9 24, Miller 8-14 2-3 24, Salau 2-8 1-2 6, Martin 4-5 0-0 8, Smith Jr. 12-0 1-0 12, Simpson 1-4 0-0 2, Gibson 0-1-2 1, Richards 0-0 0-0 0, Micic 0-1 0-0 0. Totals 38-91 14-19 105.

CLEVELAND (115)

Mobley 6-13 4-5 17, Wade 2-4 0-0 6, Allen 9-10 1-2 19, Garland 8-14 5-5 25, Mitchell 6-16 0-0 19, LeVert 1-6 0-0 2, Strus 3-9 2-2 9, Jerome 3-10 0-0 8, Niang 4-7 0-0 10, Thompson 0-1-0 2, Porter Jr. 0-0 0-0 0, Thor 0-0 0-0 0, Tyson 0-2 0-0 0. Totals 44-92 12-16 115.

CHA 115, CLE 105

CHA 23 25 30 27 - 105
CLE 29 34 28 24 - 115

3-Point Goals: Charlotte 15-42 (Miller 6-10, Smith Jr. 4-6, Ball 3-11, Salau 1-5, Bridges 1-6, Simpson 0-1, Green 0-3), Cleveland 15-43 (Garland 4-5, Mitchell 3-7, Wade 2-4, Niang 2-5, Jerome 2-5, Strus 1-5, Mobley 1-6, Tyson 0-1, LeVert 0-3). Fouled Out: None. Rebounds: Charlotte 48 (Salau, Williams 9), Cleveland 41 (Allen 11). Assists: Charlotte 19 (Martin 5), Cleveland 29 (LeVert 6). Total Fouls: Charlotte 18, Cleveland 17. A: 19,432 (20,562)

New Orleans 110, Washington 98

NEW ORLEANS (110)

Jones 4-8 2-2 11, Murphy III 8-19 2-2 22, Missi 4-5 8-8 16, McCollum 9-18 2-2 25, Murray 5-14 3-4 14, Boston Jr. 1-7 2-2 5, Theis 2-3 2-0 5, Alvarado 1-4 0-0 3, Hawkins 2-10 0-0 6, Robinson-Earl 1-2 0-0 3. Totals 37-90 18-20 110.

WASHINGTON (98)

Champagne 1-6 0-0 3, Kuzma 13-23 0-0 28, Sarr 6-9 3-5 18, Brogdon 2-7 0-0 4, Carrington 6-9 0-0 16, George 0-7 1-1 1, Kispert 1-10 3-3 5, Valanciunas 3-5 0-0 6, Butler 6-12 4-5 17, Gill 0-0 0-0 0, Davis 0-1 0-0 0. Totals 38-89 11-14 98.

NOP 110, WAS 98

NOP 33 27 24 26 - 110
WAS 22 23 25 28 - 98

3-Point Goals: New Orleans 18-49 (McCollum 6-11, Murphy III 4-10, Hawkins 2-7, Theis 1-2, Robinson-Earl 1-2, Alvarado 1-4, Jones 1-4, Boston Jr. 1-4, Murray 1-5), Washington 11-41 (Carrington 4-7, Sarr 3-6, Kuzma 2-5, Butler 1-3, Champagne 1-4, Davis 0-1, Brogdon 0-2, George 0-6, Kispert 0-7). Fouled Out: None. Rebounds: New Orleans 49 (Murphy 12), Washington 46 (Sarr 11). Assists: New Orleans 26 (Murphy 12), Washington 25 (Brogdon, Butler 5). Total Fouls: New Orleans 13, Washington 18. A: 15,451 (20,308)

Oklahoma City 105, Boston 92

BOSTON (92)

Brown 8-19 4-4 21, Tatum 7-17 10-12 26, Porzingis 6-12 6-6 19, Holiday 1-6 0-0 2, White 4-13 2-11, Horford 2-6 0-0 6, Kornet 2-2 0-0 4, Hauser 1-5 0-0 3, Pritchard 0-5 0-0 0. Totals 31-85 21-24 92.

OKLAHOMA CITY (105)

Dort 5-14 0-0 14, Williams 3-10 3-4 10, Hartenstein 4-9 0-1 8, Gilgeous-Alexander 11-23 8-8 33, Wallace 6-13 0-0 13, Wiggins 6-9 0-0 5, Joe 2-5 0-0 6, Williams 1-2 0-0 3, Williams 1-3, Wallace 1-5, Hartenstein 0-1. Fouled Out: None. Rebounds: Boston 48 (Tatum 10), Oklahoma City 46 (Gilgeous-Alexander 11). Assists: Boston 17 (Holiday 6), Oklahoma City 22 (Gilgeous-Alexander 6). Total Fouls: Boston 18, Oklahoma City 18. A: 18,203 (18,203)

Golf

Continued from Page 1NS

by one shot.

Matsuyama has won three times in less than a 12-month period. This type of result was his goal for the beginning of 2025.

"I was able to have a great offseason and get a fresh start this week and play well this week," he said. "So it was a great way to start."

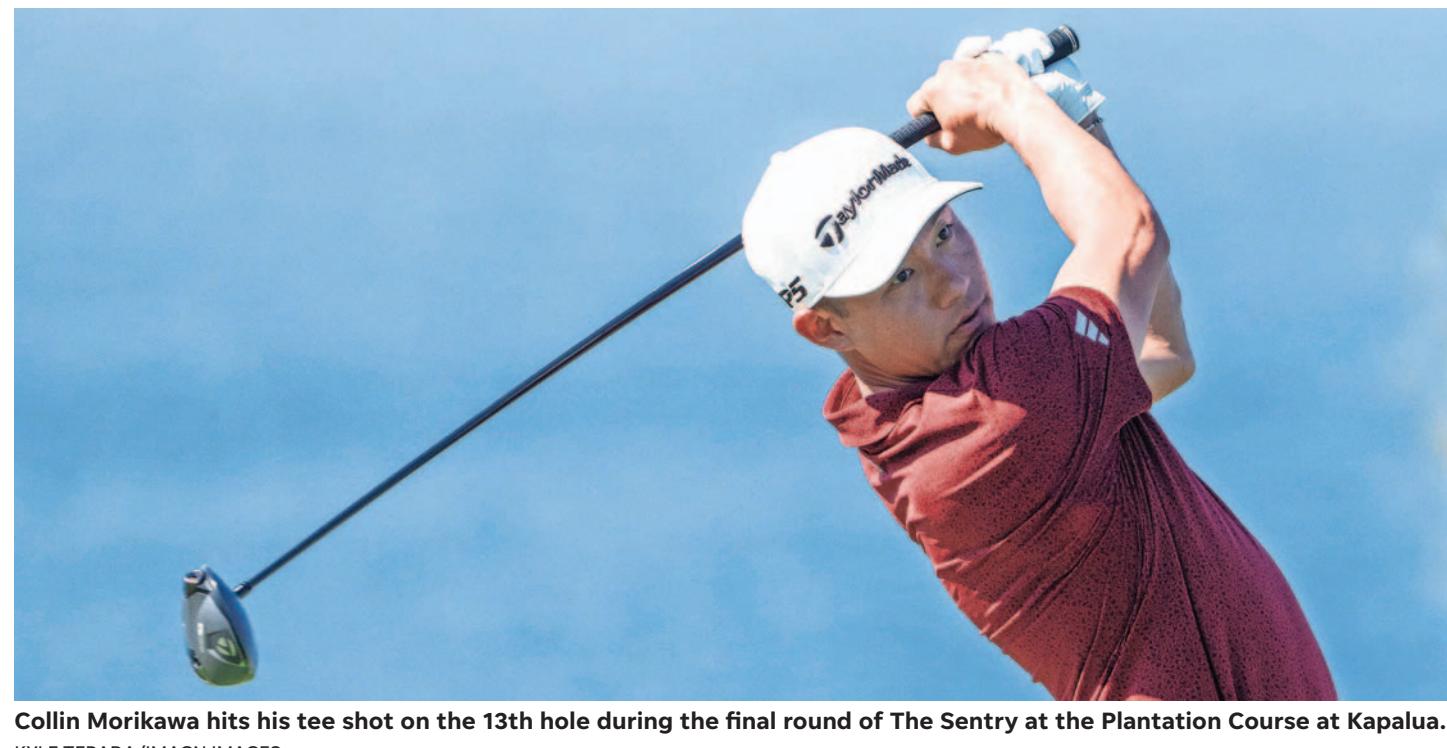
Morikawa was hoping for more out of his mostly stellar performance across four days.

"Just going through the shots I left out there," he said. "There was a good handful that I wish I could have back. ... I know there is a lot of positives, and it's going to take me a few hours or a day to get over it."

South Korea's Sungjae Im (65) was third at 29 under and Venezuela's Jhonnatan Vegas (65) placed fourth at 25 under. Belgium's Thomas Detry (71), Sweden's Ludvig Aberg (64) and Canada's Corey Conners (67) shared fifth place at 24 under.

Even golfers turning in impressive scores like those were merely afterthoughts to Matsuyama's excellence.

"Obviously you need to shoot a lot of low scores to keep up here," Aberg said. "It's a great place to start, and looking forward to a long, good season."



Collin Morikawa hits his tee shot on the 13th hole during the final round of The Sentry at the Plantation Course at Kapalua.

KYLE TERADA/IMAGN IMAGES

Morikawa said the strong showing in the tournament could be a springboard into the season.

"I came out here trying to be ready for golf, and I'm going to try and do that for every event out there," he said. "I don't care if it's my third, fourth week in a row, first week after whatever, that's going to be the mentality for the entire year."

Canada's Taylor Pendrith recorded the first albatross in the

NHL ROUNDUP

Aho rescues Hurricanes in OT win over Penguins

Field Level Media

Sebastian Aho's goal 1:30 into overtime gave the Carolina Hurricanes a 4-3 win over the visiting Pittsburgh Penguins on Sunday.

Seth Jarvis had two goals and an assist, Aho added two assists and defenseman Jalen Chatfield also scored for the Hurricanes. Dustin Tokarski stopped 16 shots.

Defenseman Erik Karlsson had a goal and an assist and Kevin Hayes and Michael Bunting scored for the Penguins. Alex Nedeljkovic made 26 saves.

Aho punched in the rebound of a shot by defenseman Dmitri Orlov for the winner.

Rangers 6, Blackhawks 2

Filip Chytil scored twice and Brett Berard, Adam Fox and Ryan Lindgren each earned two assists to lift the visiting New York Rangers to a rout of the Chicago Blackhawks.

Louis Domingue stopped 25 shots for New York while 12 Rangers registered a point to match a season high.

Blackhawks goaltender Arvid Soderblom made 28 saves for Chicago. The Blackhawks have lost six of seven.

Islanders 5, Bruins 4, OT

Bo Horvat scored his second goal of the game with 1:50 remaining in overtime as the visiting New York Islanders defeated the Boston Bruins.

After New York goaltender Ilya Sorokin (26 saves) stopped Brad Marchand at one end, Horvat rushed ahead to corral the loose puck and slid a game-winning breakaway five-hole on Boston's Joonas Korpisalo.

Anders Lee also scored a pair of goals, and Ryan Pulock had a goal and two assists to lead the Islanders, who ended a three-game losing streak.

Boston's David Pastrnak scored twice in the third period to force the extra session, marking his second multi-goal performance in as many nights.

Maple Leafs 3, Flyers 2, OT

Morgan Rielly scored at the 2:25 mark of overtime and the Toronto Maple Leafs defeated the visiting Philadelphia Flyers.

Rielly scored from the right circle



Sebastian Aho of the Hurricanes celebrates scoring the game-winning goal against the Penguins in overtime on Sunday. JARED C. TILTON/GETTY IMAGES

after taking a pass from Auston Matthews to extend Toronto's winning streak to four games.

Matthew Knies and Oliver Ekman-Larsson also scored for the Maple Leafs, who were completing a set of back-to-back home games. Matthews added two assists and Dennis Hildeby made 30 saves.

Tyson Foerster and Scott Laughton scored for the Flyers, who finished a 2-3-1 road trip. Ivan Fedotov started in goal for the first time since Dec. 5 and stopped 22 shots.

Ducks 4, Lightning 1

Frank Vatrano celebrated a new

contract with two goals and an assist, and the Anaheim Ducks continued their strong recent play by beating the visiting Tampa Bay Lightning.

Signed to a three-year extension earlier in the day, top left winger Vatrano tallied in a two-goal first period and iced the win with an empty-netter.

Troy Terry snapped the twine for the fifth time in six games and had an assist, and Jackson LaCombe scored late. Ryan Strome posted two assists in his 200th game for Anaheim.

A winner in Winnipeg on Thursday, goaltender John Gibson totaled 36 saves for his 200th NHL win.

The Pacific Division club won for the fourth time in five games (4-1-0).

Anaheim 4, Tampa Bay 1					
Tampa Bay	0	1	0	0	1
Anaheim	2	0	2	1	4
First Period	1	Anaheim, Terry 14 (Strome, Vatrano), 5:24. 1, Anaheim, Vatrano 10 (Trouba, Terry), 17:03. Penalties—Kucherov, TBL (Slashing), 7:14. Vatrano, ANA (Stick Holding), 13:45.			
Second Period	1	Tampa Bay, Guentzel 21 (Kucherov, Point), 9:12. Penalties—Hellebuyck, ANA (Interference), 8:37.			
Third Period	1	Anaheim, LaCombe 8 (Killorn, Carlsson), 16:26. 2, Anaheim, Vatrano 11 (Strome), 18:28. Penalties—None.			
Shots on Goal	Tampa Bay 5-18-14-37. Anaheim 12-8-6-26.				
Power-play opportunities	Tampa Bay 1 of 2; Anaheim 0 of 1.				
Goals	Tampa Bay, Johansson 4-3-1 (25 shots-22 saves). Anaheim, Gibson 7-5-1 (37-36). A-14,208 (17,174).				

Toronto 3, Philadelphia 2 (OT)					
Philadelphia	1	1	0	0	2
Toronto	2	0	0	1	3
First Period	1	Philadelphia, Foerster 12 (Cates, Ristola), 3:24. 1, Toronto, Kries 15 (Matthews, Tavares), 4:02. 1, Toronto, Ekman-Larsson 2 (Lorentz, Dewar), 18:52. Penalties—Hathaway, PHI (Goaltender Interference), 19:54. Hathaway, PHI (Fighting), 19:54. McCabe, TOR (Roughing), 19:54. McCabe, TOR (Fighting), 19:54.			
Second Period	1	Philadelphia, Laughton 9 (Couturer, Ristola), 11:08. Penalties—Tippett, PHI (Hooking), 3:00. Kries, TOR (Tripping), 8:57. Kampf, TOR (Holding), 16:08.			
Third Period	—	None. Penalties—Domi, TOR (Elbowing), 5:13. Overtime—1, Toronto, Rielly 5 (Matthews, Tavares), 2:25. Penalties—None.			
Shots on Goal	Philadelphia 14-9-7-2-32. Toronto 13-5-5-2-25.				
Power-play opportunities	Philadelphia 0 of 1; Toronto 0 of 1.				
Goals	Philadelphia, Fedotov (25 shots-22 saves). Toronto, Hildeby 3-1-0 (32-30). A-18,554 (18,819).				

N.Y. Islanders 5, Boston 4 (OT)					
N.Y. Islanders	2	1	1	1	5
Boston	1	1	2	0	4
First Period	1	Boston, Koepke 7 (Kastelic, McAvoy), 3:01. 1, N.Y. Islanders, Horvat 11 (Pageau, Pulock), 3:22. 1, N.Y. Islanders, Pulock 2 (Barzal, Pelech), 5:33. Penalties—N.Y. Islanders bench, served by Engvall (Delay of Game), 3:01.			
Second Period	1	N.Y. Islanders, Lee 17 (Romanov), 4:11. 1, Boston, Brazeau 10 (Peeke), 10:18. Penalties—None.			
Third Period	2	N.Y. Islanders, Lee 18 (Pulock), 3:41. 1, Boston, Pastrnak 16 (Greckie), 4:35. 2, Boston, Pastrnak 17 (Zach, Zadorov), 12:44. Penalties—None.			
Overtime	1	N.Y. Islanders, Horvat 12, 3:10. Penalties—None.			
Shots on Goal	N.Y. Islanders 12-17-7-1-37. Boston 9-9-8-4-30.				
Power-play opportunities	N.Y. Islanders 0 of 3; Boston 0 of 1.				
Goals	N.Y. Islanders, Sorokin 12-13-4 (30 shots-26 saves). Boston, Korpisalo (37-32). A-17,850 (17,565).				

Carolina 4, Pittsburgh 3 (OT)					
Pittsburgh	2	0	1	0	3
Carolina	0	3	0	1	4
First Period	1	Pittsburgh, Hayes 5 (O'Connor), 3:47.1, Pittsburgh, Bunting 12. (Karlsson, Rust), 5:08. Penalties—Lizotte, PIT (Cross-checking), 17:58.			
Second Period	1	Carolina, Jarvis 10 (Aho), 4:15. 1, Carolina, Chatfield 4 (Aho, Jarvis), 12:45. 2, Carolina, Jarvis 11 (Svechnikov, Staal), 16:18. Penalties—Martino, CAR (Tripping), 8:32. Jaaska, CAR (Interference), 16:50. Pittsburgh bench, served by Bunting (Too many men), 18:12.			
Third Period	1	Pittsburgh, Karlsson 4 (Grzelcyk, Rakell), 1:51. Penalties—Joseph, PIT (Tripping), 2:34. Chatfield, CAR (Delay of Game), 16:59.			
Overtime	1	Carolina, Aho 13 (Orlov, Necas), 1:30. Penalties—None.			
Shots on Goal	Pittsburgh 5-5-9-0-19. Carolina 9-14-5-3-31.				
Power-play opportunities	Pittsburgh 0 of 3; Carolina 0 of 3.				
Goals	Pittsburgh, Nedeljkovic (31 shots-27 saves). Carolina, Karlsson 3-1-0 (19-16). A-18,891 (18,680).				

N.Y. Rangers 6, Chicago 2					
N.Y. Rangers	2	3	1	1	6
Chicago	1	1	0	2	2
First Period	1	Chicago, Bertuzzi 14 (Bedard), 5:37.1, N.Y. Rangers, Bortz 3 (Fox, Lindgren), 15:12. 1, N.Y. Rangers, Borgen, 2, 18:22. Penalties—Trocheck, N.Y. (Tripping), 1:13.			
Second Period	1	N.Y. Rangers, Chytil 9 (Fox, Berard), 3:28. 1, N.Y. Rangers, Smith 8 (Zibanejad, Lindgren), 9:54. 1, N.Y. Rangers, Trocheck 11 (Panarin, Lafreniere), 15:16. 1, Chicago, Kaiser 1 (Nazari, Brode), 18:00. Penalties—None.			
Third Period	2	N.Y. Rangers, Chytil 10 (Miller, Berard), 8:36. Penalties—Smith, CHI (Slashing), 19:46. Vaakanainen, N.Y. (Cross-checking), 19:46.			
Shots on Goal	N.Y. Rangers 14-11-9-34. Chicago 6-7-14-27.				
Power-play opportunities	N.Y. Rangers 0 of 0; Chicago 0 of 1.				
Goals	N.Y. Rangers, Domigue 1-0-0 (27 shots-25 saves). Chicago, Soderblom 6-10-1 (34-28). A-18,819 (19,717).				

COLLEGE FOOTBALL NOTEBOOK

Rashada to transfer after one season at Georgia

Marc Weiszer

Athens Banner-Herald

USA TODAY NETWORK

Jaden Rashada is planning to hit the transfer portal again.

The quarterback was a high-profile addition to Georgia football last spring, but never played in a game for the Bulldogs. His decision to enter the portal, reported by 247Sports and ESPN on Sunday, comes three days after Georgia's season ended in a Sugar Bowl loss to Notre Dame.

The 6-foot-4, 190-pound redshirt freshman was behind Carson Beck, Gunner Stockton and seemingly Ryan Puglisi this season after transferring from Arizona State. He remained in the headlines after suing Florida coach Billy Napier and others for a \$13.8 million NIL deal that collapsed.

"I'm developing pretty well," Rashada told the Athens Banner-Herald prior to Thursday's Sugar Bowl. "I've got great coaches, great guys to learn from, a great team around me. No complaints to me as a player."

Said coach Kirby Smart last week: "Jaden is a guy that got here a little bit late. He didn't get here until summer and is kind of trying to play catch up. Since the SEC championship, he's gotten more reps and with more reps, you've seen him improve and have a better understanding."

The Bulldogs' quarterback room for 2025 includes Stockton, Puglisi and freshmen Ryan Montomgery and Clarke Central's Hezekiah Millender.

Georgia had engaged with quarterbacks in the transfer portal and figures to continue to do that with Rashada exiting the program.

Rashada has said he wasn't in a hurry to get on the field at Georgia.

"That's up to God and His timing for me," he said. "So we'll just see how that pans out."

Branch brothers commit to Georgia

Georgia picked up commitments



Georgia quarterback Jaden Rashada warms up before the start of a game against Massachusetts in Athens, Ga., on Nov. 23.

JOSHUA L. JONES/ATHENS BANNER-HERALD

from a pair of transfers who are brothers that it hopes can upgrade two positions on its roster.

Southern Cal wide receiver Zachariah Branch and safety Zion Branch announced Sunday they planned to sign with the Bulldogs. Zion Branch announced his decision on Instagram and Zachariah Branch is also committing, per 247Sports.

Zachariah Branch led the Trojans in 2024 with 47 catches last season for 503 yards as a sophomore. The 5-foot-10, 175-pounder was named an All-American as a returner as a true freshman in 2023 when he returned both a kickoff and punt return for touchdowns. The Trojans used him as a slot receiver.

"I think he's growing as a receiver, as a ball carrier, understanding offenses, understanding route running, understanding defenses, how we're trying to

attack people," USC coach Lincoln Riley said last summer. "There's just a maturity and a growth process that we've really pushed him on, and I think he's handled it well."

Zion Branch had 19 tackles in

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

MEN'S TOP 25 ROUNDUP

Oregon pulls away from pesky Maryland

Field Level Media

Keeshawn Barthelemy hit a 3-pointer with 2:16 left to give No. 9 Oregon the lead for good in a therapeutic 83-79 victory over visiting No. 24 Maryland on Sunday in Eugene, Ore.

Jackson Shelstad made all five of his 3-point attempts, scoring 23 points, as the Ducks (13-2, 2-2 Big Ten) recovered from a stunning 109-77 loss to No. 22 Illinois on Thursday, in which they surrendered the most points ever in a regulation game at home.

In its first-ever meeting with Maryland, Oregon also got 16 points and six rebounds from Nate Bittle and 14 points and five assists from Barthelemy. Reserve Kwame Evans Jr. scored all 10 of his points in the second half.

Rodney Rice scored 19 points to lead Maryland (11-4, 1-3). Derik Queen added 17 points and five rebounds while Ja'Kobi Gillespie provided 16 points.

No. 7 Kansas 99, UCF 48

Hunter Dickinson dominated host UCF with 27 points, nine rebounds and three blocks as Kansas trounced the Knights in Orlando, Fla., for the Jayhawks' first win in the series. Dickinson narrowly missed his fifth consecutive double-double, but it was more than enough to help Kansas (10-3, 1-1 Big 12) avoid an 0-2 start in conference play for the first time since the 1990-91 season.

Freshman Flory Bidunga added 12 points and a career-high six blocked shots — Kansas had 12 blocks total — as the Jayhawks evened the series at 1-1.

Rylan Griffen came off the bench and scored 14 points, including 4-of-4 shooting from 3-point range. KJ Adams had a solid all-around performance with nine rebounds, seven points, three assists and two blocks; Dajuan Harris Jr. added 11 points and six rebounds; and Zeke Mayo dished out eight of Kansas' 30 assists. Keyshawn Hall had 12 points, six rebounds and three steals for UCF



Maryland forward Tafara Gapare (6) attempts to block a shot by Oregon forward Kwame Evans Jr. (10) during the second half at Matthew Knight Arena.

CRAIG STROBECK/IMAGN IMAGES

(10-3, 1-1), which had its six-game winning streak snapped.

No. 13 UConn 87, Providence 84

Hassan Diarra scored a career-high 19 points and Solo Ball tossed in 16 to help UConn overcome a 14-point second-half deficit and defeat Providence in Storrs, Conn.

Aidan Mahaney added 15 points and Alex Karaban had 13 for the Huskies, who outscored the Friars 60-45 in the second half. UConn (12-3, 4-0 Big East) shot 56.3 percent from the field (27 of 48) and made 27 of its 32 free-throw attempts.

Providence (7-8, 1-3) received a game-high 24 points from Jayden Pierre

and 18 from Wesley Cardet.

No. 20 Illinois 81, Washington 77

Kasparas Jakucionis had 18 points, six assists and five rebounds as Illinois held on to defeat Washington in Seattle and complete a sweep of its trip to the Pacific Northwest.

Tre White had 17 points and seven rebounds and Kylan Boswell added 14 points, including two clinching free throws with six seconds left, for the Fighting Illini (11-3, 3-1 Big Ten), which has won four consecutive games.

DJ Davis led the Huskies (10-5, 1-3), who were coming off a 75-69 upset of Maryland, with career highs of 31 points and seven 3-pointers. Luis Kortright

scored 10, the only other Washington player to reach double-digits.

No. 22 Purdue 79, Northwestern 61

Braden Smith bundled 22 points with six rebounds and seven assists to help Purdue beat Northwestern in West Lafayette, Ind.

Trey Kaufman-Renn and C.J. Cox added 12 points apiece for the Boilermakers (11-4, 3-1 Big Ten), who never trailed and led by as many as 29 en route to their third straight win. Purdue outshot the Wildcats 50.9 percent to 38.3 percent and held them to their fewest points this season.

Freshman Angelo Ciaravino scored a season-high 19 points to lead Northwestern (10-5, 1-3), which also got 11 points from both Jalen Leach and Brooks Barnizer. Nick Martinelli, who entered Sunday second in the Big Ten in scoring (20.1 points per game), managed just 10 on 2-of-8 shooting.

No. 25 Memphis 68, North Texas 64

PJ Haggerty made his first seven shots on his way to a game-high 27 points, Dain Dainja added 14 and Memphis held off a feisty North Texas squad to earn a home win.

It was not without drama, however, as a dunk by Moulaye Sissoko helped North Texas trim the deficit to two points with 12 seconds remaining. But Colby Rogers made two free throws to earn Memphis (12-3, 2-0 American) its fifth win in six games.

Haggerty, who scored 23 or more points for the sixth time in nine games, also eclipsed 1,000 points for his career. Tyrese Hunter chipped in with 12 points and six rebounds.

Brenen Lorient paced North Texas (10-4, 1-1) with 18 points, including 14 in the second half, while Sissoko posted a career-high 17 points on 7-of-8 shooting to go along with eight boards.

WOMEN'S TOP 25 ROUNDUP

Bueckers hurt in UConn's win

Field Level Media

Paige Bueckers scored 15 points before leaving the game with a knee injury in the third quarter as visiting No. 8 UConn routed Big East Conference rival Villanova 83-52 on Sunday.

Bueckers dove for a loose ball along with the Wildcats' Jasmine Bascoe, who rolled into her left leg. Bueckers, the projected No. 1 overall pick in this year's WNBA draft, returned to the bench later in the game with an ice pack on her knee. Huskies coach Geno Auriemma said he's optimistic that Bueckers isn't seriously injured.

Sarah Strong scored a game-high 21-points for UConn (13-2, 4-0), while Villanova (7-8, 1-2) was paced by Bascoe's 12 points.

No. 2 South Carolina 95, Mississippi State 68

Tessa Johnson came off the bench for 22 points as the Gamecocks shrugged off a slow start to earn a Southeastern Conference rout of the Bulldogs in Starkville, Miss.

Chloe Kitts added 17 points and 10 rebounds for South Carolina (14-1, 2-0), which trailed 22-13 after a quarter before outscoring Mississippi State 55-23 in the middle two quarters.

Jerkaila Jordan scored a game-high 24 points for the Bulldogs (13-3, 0-2).

No. 3 Notre Dame 76, No. 17 North Carolina 66

Hannah Hidalgo scored 24 points and dished out five assists as the Fighting Irish notched an Atlantic Coast Conference win over the Tar Heels in Chapel Hill, N.C.

Olivia Miles added 19 points, seven rebounds and five assists for Notre Dame (12-2, 3-0), while Liatu King tallied 15 rebounds to go with eight points.

North Carolina (13-3, 1-2) got 16 points and nine rebounds from Maria Gakdeng.

No. 6 Texas 90, Arkansas 56

Six players scored in double figures



Tennessee's Sara Puckett, right, and Oklahoma's Nevaeh Tot try to get a rebound on Sunday in Knoxville, Tenn. SAUL YOUNG/KNOXVILLE NEWS SENTINEL

as the Longhorns rolled to an SEC rout of the Razorbacks in Austin, Texas.

Aaliyah Moore scored 17 points and grabbed 14 rebounds for Texas (15-1, 2-0), which earned a 46-27 advantage on the boards and forced 25 turnovers.

Arkansas (7-10, 0-2) got a game-high 23 points from Izzy Higginbottom.

No. 4 LSU 73, Auburn 63

A 27-8 second-quarter burst was the difference as LSU stayed unbeaten by winning the matchup of SEC Tigers in Baton Rouge, La.

Aneesah Morrow scored 21 points and grabbed 14 rebounds for LSU (17-0, 2-0), while Kailyn Gilbert added 17 on 8-of-10 shooting off the bench.

Auburn (9-6, 0-2) got 19 points off the bench from Audia Young.

No. 10 Oklahoma 87, No. 13 Tennessee 86

The Sooners built a 16-point lead after three quarters and hung on to hand the Lady Vols their first loss in an SEC thriller in Knoxville, Tenn.

Peyton Verhulst scored 16 points for Oklahoma (13-2, 1-1), including two foul shots with 50 seconds left that proved to be the difference. Raegan Beers added 13 points and eight rebounds.

Jewel Spear fired in a game-high 28

for Tennessee (13-1, 1-1), which had a chance to win but saw Sara Puckett miss a 3-pointer in the last five seconds.

No. 9 Ohio State 92, Northwestern 62

The Buckeyes raced to a 77-43 lead after three quarters en route to an easy Big Ten Conference win over the Wildcats in Columbus, Ohio.

Jaloni Cambridge scored a game-high 20 points for Ohio State (14-0, 3-0), which led by 39 at one point in the fourth quarter. Cotie McMahon had 16 points as five Buckeyes scored in double figures.

Kyla Jones tallied 15 points for Northwestern (7-8, 0-4), which has lost three in a row.

No. 15 Duke 69, Pitt 31

The Blue Devils forced 29 turnovers and allowed the punchless Panthers to hit just 11 of 45 field goal attempts in posting an easy ACC victory in Durham, N.C.

Reagan Richardson scored 13 points for Duke (12-3, 3-0), reaching the 1,000-point mark for her career.

Khadija Faye tallied a game-high 17 points for Pitt (8-8, 0-3), which had just four other players score.

No. 16 Kentucky 96, Vanderbilt 78

Georgia Amoore finished with 24 points and nine assists as the Wildcats bombed in 15 3-pointers and scored 31 first-quarter points in an SEC win over the Commodores in Nashville, Tenn.

Amelia Hassett added 20 points (six 3-pointers), nine rebounds and five assists as five players scored in double figures for Kentucky (13-1, 2-0).

Vanderbilt (14-2, 1-1) got 24 points out of Mikayla Blakes.

No. 20 Alabama 68, Missouri 49

Zaay Green scored a game-high 23 points and the Crimson Tide started SEC play 2-0 for the first time in 21 seasons by drilling the Tigers in Tuscaloosa, Ala.

Aaliyah Nye added 11 for Alabama (15-1, 2-0), which held Missouri to 34 percent field goal shooting and forced 20 turnovers.

Angelique Ngakakondi and Nyah Wilson each scored nine points for Missouri (11-6, 0-2).

No. 19 North Carolina State 91, Boston College 52

The Wolfpack jumped out to a 28-9 first-quarter lead and never looked back in an easy ACC rout of the Eagles in Raleigh, N.C.

Saniya Rivers scored 23 points and added 11 rebounds for NC State (11-3, 3-0), while Zoe Brooks chipped in 11 points and 11 boards.

T'yana Todd scored 20 points to pace Boston College (10-7, 1-3).

Texas A&M 60, No. 25 Ole Miss 58

Sole Williams scored a game-high 18 points and the Aggies outscored the Rebels 20-6 in the fourth quarter to earn an SEC win in College Station, Texas.

Jada Malone shot a perfect 7-for-7 to post 14 points and seven rebounds off the bench for Texas A&M (8-6, 1-1).

Ole Miss (10-4, 1-1), which made only 19 of 53 shots from the field, was led by Madison Scott's 14 points.

SCOREBOARD

ODDS

Odds available as of print deadline.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Monday
FAVORITE LINE 0/U UNDERDOG
MONTANA ST. 3.5 56.5 North Dakota St.

All times Eastern

NFL

American Conference

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Buffalo	13	4	0.765	525	368	
Miami	8	9	0.471	345	347	
N.Y. Jets	9	12	0.294	338	404	
New England	4	13	0.235	289	417	

North

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Baltimore	10	5	0.706	518	361	
Pittsburgh	10	7	0.588	380	347	
Cincinnati	9	8	0.529	472	434	
Cleveland	3	14	0.176	311	460	

South

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Houston	10	7	0.588	372	372	
Indianapolis	8	9	0.471	377	427	
Jacksonville	4	13	0.235	320	435	
Tennessee	3	14	0.176	311	329	

West

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Kansas City	15	2	0.882	385	326	
L.A. Chargers	11	6	0.647	402	301	
Denver	10	7	0.588	425	311	
Las Vegas	4	13	0.235	309	434	

National Conference

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Philadelphia	14	3	0.824	463	303	
Washington	12	5	0.706	485	391	
Dallas	7	10	0.412	350	468	
N.Y. Giants	3	14	0.176	273	415	

East

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Detroit	15	2	0.882	564	342	
Minnesota	14	3	0.824	432	332	
Green Bay	11	6	0.647	460	338	
Chicago	5	12	0.294	310	370	

South

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Tampa Bay	10	7	0.588	502	385	
Atlanta	8	9	0.471	389	423	
Carolina	5	12	0.294	341	534	
New Orleans	5	12	0.294	338	398	

West

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
L.A. Rams	10	7	0.588	367	386	
Seattle	10	7	0.588	375	368	
Arizona	8	9	0.471	400	379	
San Francisco	6	11	0.353	389	436	

Saturday's Scores

Baltimore 35, Cleveland 10
Cincinnati 19, Pittsburgh 17

Sunday's Scores

Carolina 44, Atlanta 38
Washington 23, Dallas 19

Chicago 24, Green Bay 22

Indianapolis 26, Jacksonville 23
New England 23, Buffalo 16
Philadelphia 20, N.Y. Giants 13
Tampa Bay 27, New Orleans 19
Houston 23, Tennessee 14
Arizona 47, San Francisco 24
Denver 38, Kansas City 0
Seattle 30, L.A. Rams 25
L.A. Chargers 34, Las Vegas 20
N.Y. Jets 32, Miami 20
Detroit 31, Minnesota 9Playoffs
Saturday's Games
Sunday, Jan. 12Denver at Buffalo, 1 p.m., CBS
Green Bay at Philadelphia, 4:30 p.m., Fox
Washington at Tampa Bay, 8 p.m., NBC

Monday, Jan. 13

Minnesota at L.A. Rams, 8 p.m., ESPN/ABC

NBA

EASTERN CONFERENCE

Atlantic Division
Boston 26 10 .722
N.Y. Knicks 24 12 .667 2Philadelphia 14 19 .424 10½
Brooklyn 13 22 .371 12½
Toronto 8 27 .229 17½

Southeast Division

Orlando 21 16 .568 1
Miami 17 16 .515 2Atlanta 18 18 .500 2½
Charlotte 7 27 .206 12½

Washington 6 27 .182 13

Central Division

Cleveland 31 4 .886 —
Milwaukee 17 16 .515 13Indiana 18 18 .500 13½
Detroit 17 18 .486 14

Chicago 16 19 .457 15

Western Conference

Southwest Division
Houston 23 12 .657 1
Memphis 23 13 .639 ½Dallas 20 15 .571 3
San Antonio 18 17 .514 5

New Orleans 7 29 .194 16½

Northwest Division

Oklahoma City 30 5 .857 —
Denver 20 14 .588 9Minnesota 17 17 .500 12½
Portland 12 22 .353 17½

Utah 9 25 .265 20½

Pacific Division

L.A. Clippers 20 15 .571 —
L.A. Lakers 20 15 .571 —Golden State 18 17 .514 2
Sacramento 17 19 .472 3½Phoenix 15 18 .455 4
Saturday's Scores
Philadelphia 123, Brooklyn 94
Detroit 119, Minnesota 105
Indiana 126, Phoenix 108
Chicago 139, N.Y. Knicks 126
Denver 122, San Antonio 111
Utah 136, Miami 100
Portland 105, Milwaukee 102
Golden State 121, Memphis 113
L.A. Clippers 131, Atlanta 105Sunday's Scores
Oklahoma City 105, Boston 92
New Orleans 110, Washington 98
Cleveland 115, Charlotte 105
Utah 105, Orlando 92
Houston 119, L.A. Lakers 115
Sacramento 129, Golden State 99Monday's Scores
Portland at Detroit, 7 p.m.
Phoenix at Philadelphia, 7 p.m.
Indiana at Brooklyn, 7:30 p.m.
Milwaukee at Toronto, 7:30 p.m.
Orlando at N.Y. Knicks, 7:30 p.m.
Dallas at Memphis, 8 p.m.
L.A. Clippers at Minnesota, 8 p.m.
Miami at Sacramento, 10 p.m.

NHL

Eastern Conference
Atlantic DivisionToronto 26 13 2 54 129 113
Florida 24 14 2 50 135 124
Boston 20 17 5 45 111 131
Tampa Bay 20 15 2 42 137 105Ottawa 19 17 2 40 112 111
Montreal 18 18 3 39 117 132
Detroit 17 18 4 38 107 126
Buffalo 14 21 5 33 122 137

Metropolitan Division

Washington 26 10 3 55 145 104
New Jersey 24 15 3 51 134 107
Carolina 24 14 2 50 135 114Pittsburgh 17 17 7 41 125 152
Columbus 17 18 5 39 123 144
NY. Rangers 18 20 1 37 113 128
N.Y. Islanders 15 18 7 37 108 128Western Conference
Central DivisionWinnipeg 27 12 2 56 147 104
Minnesota 25 11 4 54 121 107
Dallas 24 13 1 49 123 95Loyola Maryland 80, Lehigh 74
FDU 71, Wagner 59Florida Atlantic 78, East Carolina 76
Harvard 71, Bowdoin 65
Marist 69, Quinnipiac 62Mount St. Mary's 68, Niagara 62
Manhattan 80, Rider 79Sacred Heart 99, Canisius 82
Stonehill 64, Saint Francis U 60